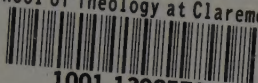


School of Theology at Claremont



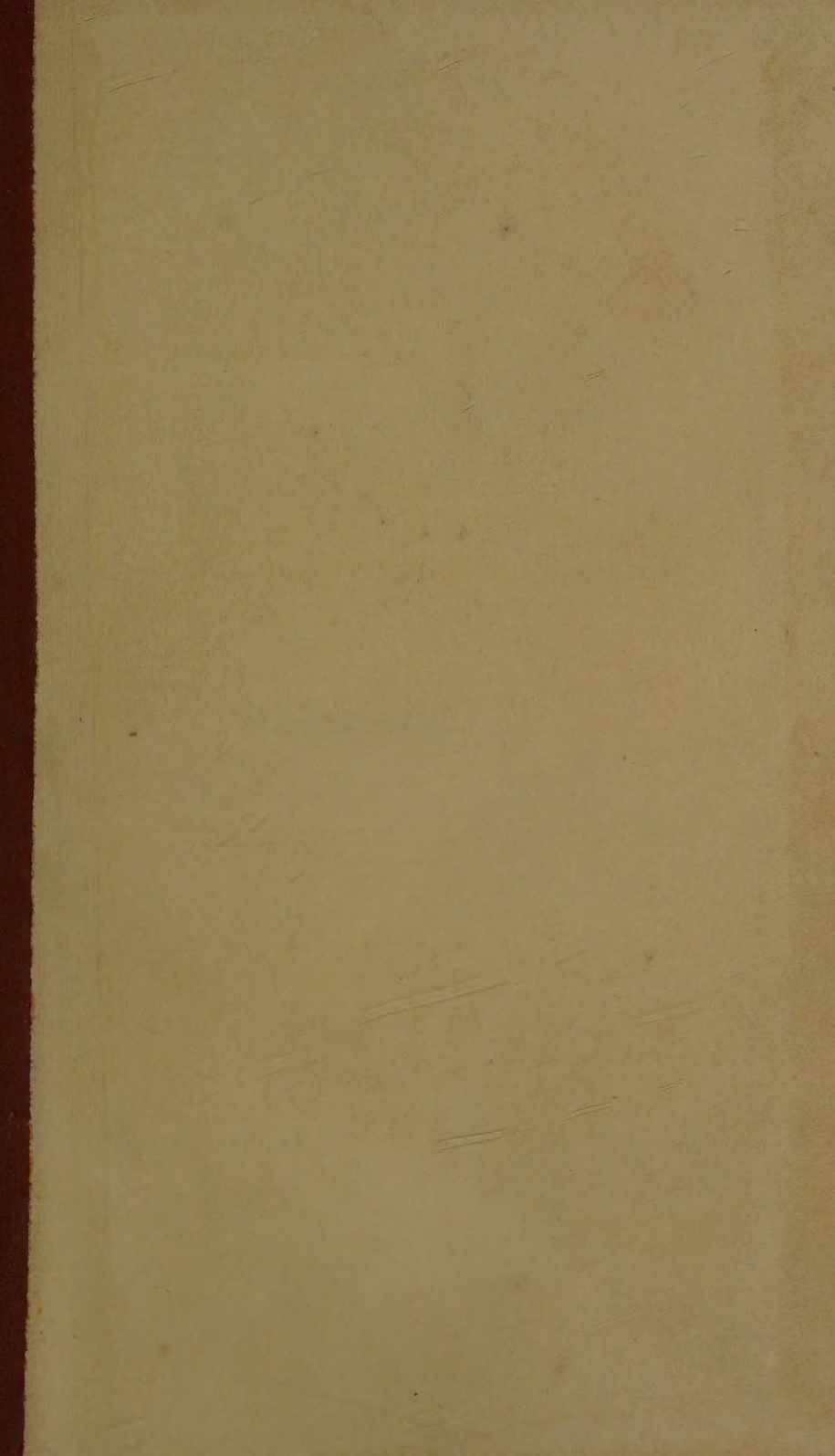
1001 1398578





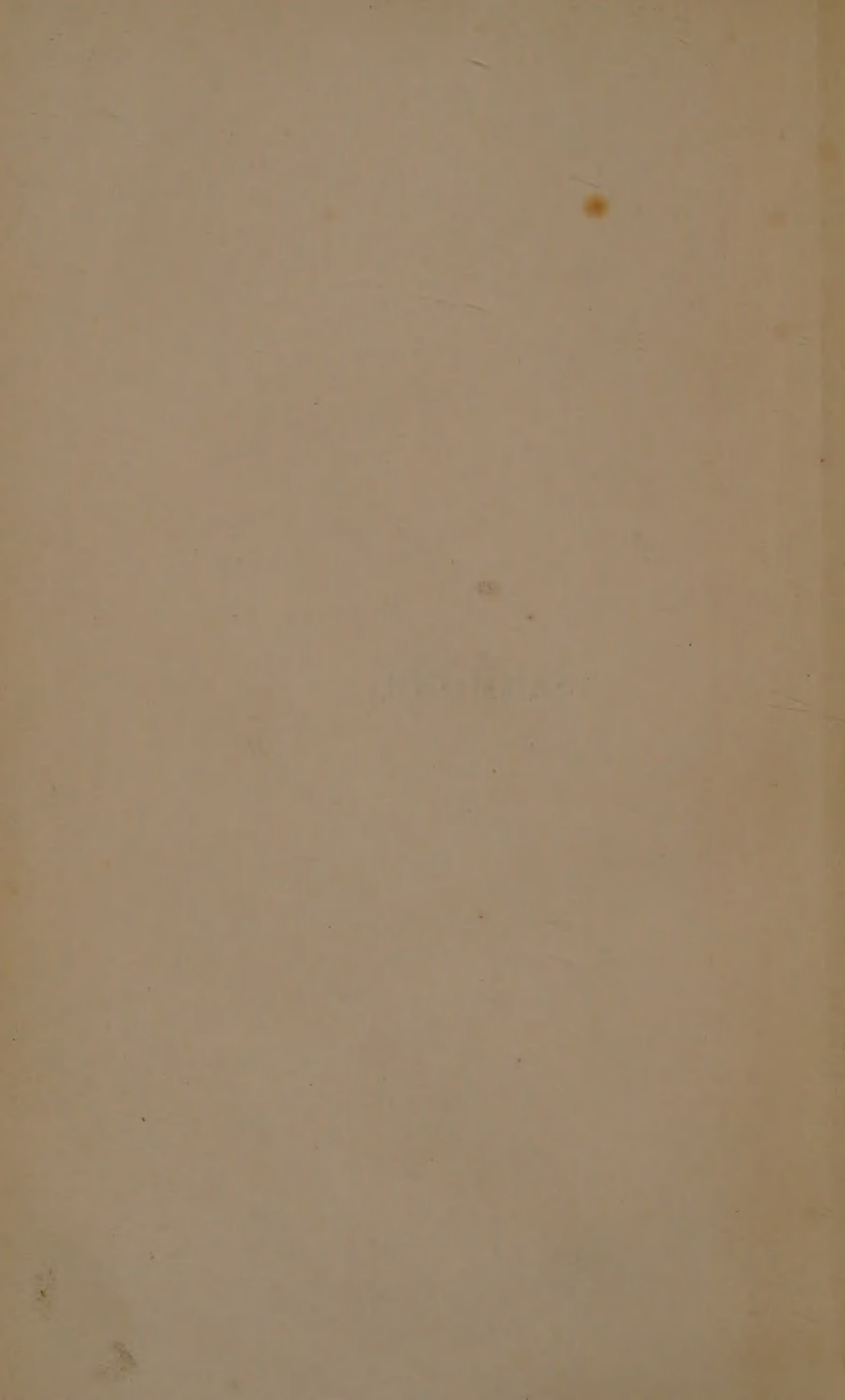
The Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT

WEST FOOTHILL AT COLLEGE AVENUE
CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA



bnr

SERMONS.



138
68
7
52
Sermons
James G. T. Weir.
PRACTICAL

22. Dec: 1885.

S E R M O N S

FOR

EVERY SUNDAY AND PRINCIPAL HOLY-DAY

IN THE YEAR.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES BRADLEY,

VICAR OF GLASBURY, BRECKNOCKSHIRE.

THE FOURTH EDITION.

LONDON :

HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.,
AND T. HATCHARD.

1852.

LONDON :
G. J. PALMER, SAVOY STREET, STRAND

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

The First Sunday in Advent.

THE DEPARTING NIGHT AND COMING DAY.

- ROMANS XIII. 12.—The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Page 1

SERMON II.

The Second Sunday in Advent.

CHRIST PROCLAIMING HIS APPROACHING ADVENT.

- REVELATION XXII. 20.—He which testifieth these things, saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen; even so; come, Lord Jesus. 10

SERMON III.

The Third Sunday in Advent.

THE LORD COMING TO HIS TEMPLE.

- MALACHI III. 1.—Behold, I will send my Messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. 21

SERMON IV.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent.

CHRIST A REFUGE.

- ISAIAH XXXII. 2.—A Man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest. 30

SERMON V.

Christmas Day.

CHRIST'S HUMAN BODY THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

- ST. JOHN II. 21.—He spake of the temple of his body. 39

SERMON VI.

The Sunday after Christmas.

CHRIST A SAVIOUR.

ST. MATTHEW I. 21.—Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. 49

SERMON VII.

The First Sunday in the Year.

THE MORROW UNKNOWN.

ST. JAMES IV. 14.—Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. 58

SERMON VIII.

The Epiphany.

THE BARREN FIG TREE.

ST. LUKE XIII. 7, 8.—Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also. 67

SERMON IX.

The First Sunday after the Epiphany.

CHRIST THE DESIRE AND GLORY OF HIS CHURCH.

HAGGAI II. 6, 7.—Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations; and the Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. 77

SERMON X.

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany.

CHRIST STANDING AT THE DOOR.

REVELATION III. 20.—Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. 85

SERMON XI.

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

ISAIAH IX. 6.—The Prince of Peace. 96

SERMON XII.

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

REVELATION XX. 11, 12.—I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. . . . 105

SERMON XIII.

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany.

THE TARES AND THE WHEAT.

ST. MATTHEW XIII. 30.—Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. . . . 114

SERMON XIV.

The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany.

CHRIST A DESTROYER.

1 JOHN III. 8.—For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. . . . 122

SERMON XV.

Septuagesima Sunday.

THE ANGELS REJOICING AT THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

JOB XXXVIII. 7.—The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. . . . 130

SERMON XVI.

Sexagesima Sunday.

THE FAITH OF NOAH.

HEBREWS XI. 7.—By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house. . . . 139

SERMON XVII.

Quinquagesima Sunday.

HAGAR IN THE WILDERNESS.

GENESIS XXI. 19.—And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. . . . 148

SERMON XVIII.

Ash-Wednesday.

THE PRAYER OF CONTRITE ISRAEL.

JEREMIAH XIV. 7.—O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake. 157

SERMON XIX.

The First Sunday in Lent.

CHRIST TEMPTED IN THE WILDERNESS.

ST. MATTHEW IV. 1.—Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. 166

SERMON XX.

The Second Sunday in Lent.

THE SIN OF ISAAC AND HIS FAMILY.

GENESIS XXVII. 12, 13.—I shall bring a curse upon me and not a blessing. And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son. 174

SERMON XXI.

The Third Sunday in Lent.

JACOB AT BETHEL.

GENESIS XXVIII. 16, 17.—And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. 184

SERMON XXII.

The Fourth Sunday in Lent.

JACOB RETURNING TO BETHEL.

GENESIS XXXV. 1, 2, 3.—And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. 195

SERMON XXIII.

The Fifth Sunday in Lent.

WEANEDNESS OF SOUL.

PSALM CXXXI. 2.—Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even as a weaned child. 204

SERMON XXIV.

The Sunday next before Easter.

SINNERS MOURNING FOR THEIR PIERCED LORD.

ZECHARIAH XII. 10.—They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son; and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. 213

SERMON XXV.

Good Friday.

THE PERFECTION OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT.

HEBREWS X. 12, 13, 14.—But this Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool; for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. 222

SERMON XXVI.

Easter Sunday.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST GLAD TIDINGS.

ACTS XIII. 32, 33, 34.—We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. 230

SERMON XXVII.

The First Sunday after Easter.

THE RISEN JESUS APPEARING TO MARY MAGDALENE.

ST. JOHN XX. 16.—Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself and saith unto him, Rabboni. 239

SERMON XXVIII.

The Second Sunday after Easter.

THE MUTUAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST AND HIS SHEEP.

ST. JOHN X. 14.—I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. 248

SERMON XXIX.

The Third Sunday after Easter.

THE DIVINE COMMANDMENTS SOURCES OF PEACE.

ISAIAH XLVIII. 18.—O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea. 256

SERMON XXX.

The Fourth Sunday after Easter.

CHRIST THE HOPE OF GLORY.

COLOSSIANS I. 27 —Christ in you, the hope of glory. 266

SERMON XXXI.

The Fifth Sunday after Easter.

THE BLIND LED.

ISAIAH XLIII. 16.—I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them. 275

SERMON XXXII.

The Sunday after Ascension Day.

CHRIST SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

PSALM CX. 1, 2, 3.—The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness; from the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth. 285

SERMON XXXIII.

Whit-Sunday.

THE PROMISED COMFORTER.

ST. JOHN XIV. 16, 17.—I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you. 296

SERMON XXXIV.

Trinity Sunday.

CHRIST THE LIGHT OF HEAVEN.

REVELATION XXI. 23.—The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. 304

SERMON XXXV.

The First Sunday after Trinity.

THE FALL OF JERICHO.

JOSHUA VI. 16.—It came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. 313

SERMON XXXVI.

The Second Sunday after Trinity.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT OF CHRIST.

ST. JOHN XV. 12.—This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. 323

SERMON XXXVII.

The Third Sunday after Trinity.

ELI TREMBLING FOR THE ARK.

1 SAMUEL IV. 13.—Lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the way-side watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. 332

SERMON XXXVIII.

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

THE DISCIPLES WONDERING AT THE DIFFICULTIES OF SALVATION.

ST. MARK X. 26, 27.—They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus, looking upon them, saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God. 342

SERMON XXXIX.

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity.

REST IN CHRIST FOR THE HEAVY LADEN.

ST. MATTHEW XI. 28.—Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 353

SERMON XL.

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

REST IN HEAVEN FOR THE TROUBLED.

- 2 THESSALONIANS I. 6, 7.—It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven. . . . 362

SERMON XLI.

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

TRUE RELIGION EXEMPLIFIED IN MARY.

- ST. LUKE X. 41, 42.—Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her. . . . 372

SERMON XLII.

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

- ST. JOHN XI. 43, 44.—And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth; and he that was dead, came forth. . . . 382

SERMON XLIII.

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

THE ISRAELITES DESIRING FLESH IN THE WILDERNESS.

- NUMBERS XI. 33.—And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague. . . . 391

SERMON XLIV.

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity.

MARY ANOINTING CHRIST.

- ST. MARK XIV. 8, 9.—She hath done what she could; she is come afore-hand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done, shall be spoken of for a memorial of her. . . . 401

SERMON XLV.

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

A SINNER PRAYING FOR MERCY.

- ST. LUKE XVIII. 13.—The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. . . . 411

SERMON XLVI.

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

ST. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR ONESIPHORUS.

- 2 TIMOTHY I. 18.—The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day. 421

SERMON XLVII.

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

THE SERVANTS OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN.

- REVELATION XXII. 3, 4.—His servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. 430

SERMON XLVIII.

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.

THE TEN LEPERS.

- ST. LUKE XVII. 15, 16.—And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks. 440

SERMON XLIX.

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

DAVID'S CONFIDENCE IN THE PROSPECT OF THE FUTURE.

- PSALM XXIII. 1.—I shall not want. 448

SERMON L.

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity.

MAN'S NEED SUPPLIED FROM GOD'S RICHES.

- PHILIPPIANS IV. 19.—My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus. 458

SERMON LI.

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity.

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

- 2 CORINTHIANS VIII. 9.—Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. 468

SERMON LII.

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.

CHRIST ABLE TO KEEP AND SAVE.

JUDE 24, 25.—Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. . . . 478

SERMON LIII.

The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.

JESUS SUFFERING WITHOUT THE GATE.

HEBREWS XIII. 11, 12, 13.—The bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. . . . 488

SERMON LIV.

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity.

THE CHURCH THE HOUSE OF GOD.

1 TIMOTHY III. 15.—The house of God, which is the church of the living God. . . . 496

SERMON LV.

The Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity.

THE CHURCH THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

ZECHARIAH VI. 12, 13.—He shall build the temple of the Lord, even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory. . . . 506

SERMON LVI.

The Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD BUILT AMIDST DIFFICULTIES.

ZECHARIAH IV. 6, 7.—This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain; and he shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it. . . . 517

SERMON LVII.

The Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity.

THE DUTY OF PLEASING GOD.

HEBREWS XI. 5.—Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.	527
---	-----

SERMON LVIII.

The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity.

A DISEASED WOMAN HEALED.

ST. MARK V. 28.—She said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.	537
---	-----

SERMON LIX.

The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity.

CHRIST INVITING HIS SAINTS TO HIS KINGDOM.

ST. MATTHEW XXV. 34.—Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.	546
---	-----

SERMON I.

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE DEPARTING NIGHT AND COMING DAY.

ROMANS XIII. 12.—“The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”

It is once again Advent in the church, and the thoughts of most of us are naturally turning to the two great events the church is now contemplating—the first lowly appearance of our Lord in our nature at Bethlehem, and his coming again in his glorious majesty to judge the world. But there are a few among us, who, without forgetting these events, have other thoughts also in our minds. We have begun to-day a new year in our public service, and “How swiftly,” we have said within ourselves, “do these years run round! How rapidly are they hurrying our mortal life to an end!” Now here in the text is a holy apostle speaking nearly the same language. Our thoughts, he tells us, are his own. He states a fact to us, which places death and eternity directly before us, and then he points out to us the conduct which becomes us in our near approach to them.

I. Let us consider *the fact he states*—“The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”

It will strike you at once that, in his use of these terms, the apostle directly reverses the sense in which our Lord uses them. Referring to it as the season afforded him for accomplishing his appointed work, our Lord calls the present life day; “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work.” But here the present life is called night, and the future day. The explanation is easy—

the Lord Jesus is contrasting the present scene with the stillness and darkness of the grave, while the apostle is looking on it in contrast with the bright heaven that lies beyond it.

"The night"—it is a picture of the Christian's present state. In comparison with other men, he is in broad day; and so he is in comparison with his own former condition. "Ye were sometime darkness," says the apostle, "but now are ye light in the Lord." But here the apostle is not thinking of other men, nor looking back to our own natural state: he is looking forward; he has a glorious eternity in view; and as he contemplates that, he feels that he and his fellow-believers are all still in darkness, that the shadows of night still overhang them.

And the figure, in this application of it, comes home at once to our own experience and feelings. Is night a cheerless season? So are many of our present hours to us. Is it a season sometimes of incertitude and perplexity? So are often the seasons of this mortal life. Is it a period of comparative inactivity? a period wherein we find it impossible to do many things we wish to accomplish? Who is there, that does not feel his spiritual condition here to be the same? We cannot do the things that we would; we are impeded at every step, "sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us." And is night a time of danger? We are never out of danger in this evil world.

But it is our ignorance in this evil world, that this figure most forcibly represents. Night throws a veil over the face of things: the traveller sees nothing of the objects around him. He may be passing through the most beautiful scenes, but he might almost as well be going over a desert. Strain his eyes as he will, nature and its beauties are for the greater part hidden from him. So with us. What do we know here of the things we most wish to know? of the things which, we are sure, would fill our hearts with admiration could we but discern them? The Saviour's beauty and the Saviour's glory, the excellency of an infinite God, his ways and his doings and his purposes, the glory of his kingdom—we speak of these things, but what do we know of them? We must not say, Nothing, but it is little more than nothing; about as much as the traveller sees at midnight of the wide-spread plain on his right hand, or of the mountain that towers above him on his left. The world is indeed a night to us; not, blessed be God! a night of total darkness. The

stars do sometimes shine above us, and flashes of heavenly light will now and then cross our path, and, in our happier seasons, something like the mild, steady rays of an unclouded moon will reach and cheer us; but, at the very best, it is night with us still, and often do we long for the shadows to flee away, and the darkness to be gone.

But here is another metaphor—"the day." It signifies heaven. "There shall be no night there," we are told; nothing to endanger, or impede, or bewilder, or distress; no obscurity, no darkness. Every thing we wish done away with here, shall be done away with there, and completely done away with; there shall be no night, nothing of night, left. And there shall be every thing come, which we have so long wished to see come. "The day"—sunshine, and brightness, and beauty, and happiness, are all connected in our minds with the word; and all the pleasant visions the word calls up in our minds, are embodied and realized in heaven. It is a low thing to say that we can get no idea here of the positive happiness of heaven; this one word suggests to us many lively ideas of it.

Travel on a bright day through a beautiful country, with the glorious sun shining above you and all nature around you exulting in his shining; every mountain, valley, and hill, receiving brightness and glory and, as it seems to you, gladness from him, and delighting you, as you pass along, by reflecting this glory and gladness. Then transfer this scene to heaven. There shines in unclouded splendour the Sun of righteousness. "The glory of God," it is said, "doth lighten" that happy world, and "the Lamb," the manifestation of his glory, "is the light thereof." And this glorious light is ever shining on the most glorious objects. And we in heaven shall behold these objects, and behold them clearly, and be mixed amongst them, and have the same light shining on ourselves and imparting a radiance to ourselves, causing us often to stand still and wonder at our own magnificence. We, poor worms of the dust, irradiated with our great Saviour's glory, even we "shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father." "Day"—it represents the heaven before us as a world of vision and knowledge, and he who loves the great Lord of heaven as some of you love him, must feel that to see him, to know him as he is, must be happiness, happiness indeed; much more to be transformed into his image, and to reflect his glory.

Now this day, the apostle says, is near; "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." He speaks like a man who has long felt himself benighted in the world, and who sees at last the morning breaking. "Now," he says in the preceding verse, "is our salvation nearer than when we believed," than when we first believed; time has brought it nearer. He looks on himself and his fellow-believers as standing on the very verge of God's kingdom. And may not this be the case, brethren, with some of us, even with some of us who hardly suppose it to be our case? The years slide away so evenly and silently with us, that we are hardly conscious of their motion. They carry us along as a smooth stream carries along the vessel that is floating on it. Or else they are like the troubled waves of the sea—we are so taken up with their tossings, that we forget every thing else; we forget there is a tide and a current among these turbulent waves, and that they are bearing us onward while they are distressing us. "The night is far spent," we may have almost done with the world: "the day is at hand," we may be within a step of eternity. How then in this situation does the apostle call on us to act?

II. We must look at *the advice he gives us* grounded on the fact he states. He places himself among us and says, "Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."

Before however we can do this, there is something else to be done. Look back once more to the foregoing verse. He has there in his mind a man asleep by night just as the morning is about to break. It is clear that such a man must in the first instance rouse himself, he must awake. Till he has done this, he can do nothing else. The apostle accordingly calls on us to awake. Like a fellow-traveller or a fellow-soldier who has risen before us, he comes to us, announces the approaching morning, and bids us rise. "Knowing the time," he says, how near the day is, "it is high time that we awake out of sleep." And turn to the fifth chapter of his first epistle to the Thessalonians: we find him expressing there the same idea. "The day of the Lord," he says, "is coming, and coming speedily, and we are all the children of the light and the children of the day. Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch, watch for the day; be up and prepared for it."

Now all this supposes that even real Christians may sink into a state too much resembling sleep; into a state of spiritual negligence, and sloth, and almost torpor. And it shews us, brethren, that out of a state like this, if we are in it, we must be roused before we can obey the exhortation here given us or any other. A man asleep can do nothing; he is fit for nothing; you must wake him before he can be active again. Shall we say, May God in his mercy wake us? The apostle here seems rather to say, "Do not wait for this; wake yourselves. By prayer, by effort, by a careful avoiding of whatever chills the spiritual life within you, get rid of the torpor which has overspread your souls. The day is at hand. Your Lord and Saviour is at hand, bringing your full salvation with him. Now therefore arouse yourselves; awake and arise."

The exhortation in the text supposes us to be thus awake, to be in the situation of men returning once again at break of day to consciousness; and it calls on us to put off certain things in which we have arrayed ourselves, and to put on other things more becoming us.

1. We are to "cast off the works of darkness."

And what are these? Evil works, evil dispositions and practices. They are called "works of darkness," because they are works that court secrecy and concealment; dark works; things which a man does by stealth, and tries to hide as he does them. And they are works that are connected with Satan, the prince of darkness; they are congenial with his nature, and are often the result of his temptations and influence.

And O how full is this benighted world of such works as these! Early in life we see little of them; we wonder at what we hear from older men of the world's hypocrisy and vileness; but let any one live forty or fifty years in the world, and have opportunities of looking below the surface of society into men's private habits and histories—what a world of iniquity does he find it! He sees in it indeed much to admire, much to be thankful for, much that glorifies the power and goodness of God, but much still that makes him wonder at God's patience with it, much that shocks him, and disgusts him, and grieves his inmost soul. There are times when the world appears to him but little better than a field of whited sepulchres, without fair and specious, but within a dismal scene of all that is mournful and revolting.

Now from all these things, these works of darkness, the Christian is to free himself. He has indeed been freed from them in the main long ago, but he is supposed to have been off his guard, sleeping, and to have wrapped himself up again in some of these works; and now he is awake, he is to throw them off, as he would throw off an unseemly night-dress, garments which are unbecoming and unfit for the day.

It is impossible, brethren, to fall into a state of spiritual indifference and sloth without getting some of these unclean things upon us. A man, when he wakes up from such a state, is sure to find evil cleaving to him, evil which he did not see or think of while he was slumbering, but which he now feels to his sorrow is encompassing him. "O how could I do this?" he says, "and how could I fall into that? Where was my love for my Saviour, and where my fear of my God? I am a wonder to myself, and a grief and shame to myself. I feel like a man who suddenly finds himself clothed, he knows not how, in garments, unclean garments, which he had long since thrown aside, and never thought of seeing again." "You must throw them aside again," this text says. "The day is coming, and they are unfit for the day. You must, by God's help, cast them off."

And these evil works, observe, are to be got rid of in the first place. We are to put them off before we attempt to put any thing else on. There is not a greater delusion than to think we can be clothed in the graces of Christ's Spirit, while we are holding fast any beloved sin. As to our bodies, we may put a clean garment over an unclean one, and come forth fair and even splendid in appearance when we have done so; but we cannot act thus with our souls. We can never get our minds imbued with any one Christian grace, as long as we are harbouring in our minds any one unchristian lust. This is like attempting to plant fruits and flowers in poisoned ground; they will not grow, they will not take root. Where the heart is impure, the whole soul will be unfruitful, and barren, and in the end desolate. Hence it is that "ceasing to do evil" is so often joined in scripture with "learning to do well," and generally put before it. We are to "lay aside every weight," this apostle says, "and the sin which doth so easily beset us," and then we are to "run with patience the race that is set before us." We are to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," he says again; then shall we be in a condition to set

about "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." O that the Spirit of God would teach all of us this! O that he would discover to many of us to-day something or other he would have us cast off! There are few of us perhaps, who have not something to renounce. Part with it, brethren. If it is a work of darkness, if it will not bear the light, if you would be ashamed to practise it before your fellow-men, nay, if it will not bear the light of heaven, if you would be afraid to practise it in God's sight, have done with it; throw it away; it is not worth the keeping. Retain it, and it is easy to say what it will do with you—it will go on polluting you more and more, till at last, contaminated to your heart's core, you will become unconscious of your pollution. Your heart will be like a charnel-house, full of all uncleanness and yet quiet, senseless, feeling and knowing it not.

2. We are to "put on the armour of light."

Here the metaphor is partly kept up and partly changed. Garments are still in the apostle's mind, only now these garments are pieces of military attire. The roused up man is addressed as a warrior; he is to array himself in armour, and this "the armour of light."

"Armour"—holiness is meant, the various graces of the Holy Spirit. These are called here and elsewhere by this name, because, the Lord working by them, they defend the Christian from the dangers wherewith he is yet encompassed in the world, protecting him from his spiritual enemies when they assail him, and enabling him to obtain victory after victory over them.

"The armour of light"—this beautiful term is applied to holiness, partly on account of the source it comes from, and partly on account of its own brightness and beauty.

Its source is divine. Like the light, it is heaven-born, coming down from heaven, and from the very summit of heaven, from God himself. As evil desires and works often proceed from Satan in his dark world, so all "holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works," proceed from God in his bright world. This holiness is called therefore in another place "the armour of God," armour of God's providing and giving, and it is more than this—it is a part of God's own nature communicated to man, and the most glorious part of his nature. He is called light, he is represented to us as a bright and glorious God, chiefly because he is a pure God. He is said to be "glorious in holiness;" his purity gives him his splendour. So when he

communicates his holiness to us, he communicates with it a portion of his own glory; he clothes us in light, putting on us a moral beauty as he purifies us. We look for safety and victory only from the armour he gives us, but that armour is glittering and adorning; it ennobles and dignifies us as we go forth to the fight in it. The church in the Canticles is represented in this state. She has put on this armour of light, and now "she looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

And there is another idea conveyed by this figure—this holiness accords well with the heaven to which we are going. It is light, something harmonizing with the splendid day which is soon to break on us. Arrayed in it, we go into heaven with heavenly garments, as it were, already upon us, with our day-clothes on—a bright and beautiful dress suited for a bright and beautiful world. The expression intimates a preparedness for heaven, that "meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light," which God, the Father of lights, always gives to his saints before he takes them to their inheritance.

May I not then say to you, Christian brethren, and say it as this apostle did, like one who feels that he must say it to himself also, "Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light?" Has God by his grace made us children of the light? calling us out of a state of darkness, yea, almost forcing us out of it, and cleansing us from the guilt of ten thousand sins as he has brought us out of it, freely pardoning and freely loving us? I might say to you, look backwards into the past. O what motives to holiness, and love, and obedience, press there upon our view! And were I to speak of the present, we should see almost as many there. But the apostle bids us look forward. We are on the confines of heaven, he says. The rolling years, as they have moved along, have brought us almost within sight of it. And can we bear with and tolerate sin in ourselves there? We often look forward into heaven for comfort under the troubles of life; we are called on to-day to look forward into it for something better than comfort—for holiness; to quicken our desires for holiness, to discover more of the beauty and glory of holiness, to stir us up to renewed prayers and efforts for holiness; to send us from these walls to our homes searching our hearts and lives; asking ourselves, each of us, some such simple questions as these,

What sin is there, which, by the strength of God, I can cast farther from me? What grace is there, that I have yet to put on?

We are in an evil world, brethren; a world of polluting, contaminating, soul-destroying evil; a world which every holy man who sees it as it is, often aches to look at, and at times almost trembles to be in. You, and I, and our children, must be armed, if we would walk safely through it; and the only armour that will avail us, is this armour of light, this armour of God. Prudence will not secure us; education and care cannot be depended on to secure our children. What we want for them and for ourselves, is the regenerating, controlling, heart-purifying influence of the grace of Christ. Nay, we want Christ himself within us, his Spirit and nature. Then may we tread even in this evil world firmly. It may tempt us; it may harass us; and when we will not follow it in its evil doings, it may treat us as it has treated in all ages the saints and servants of God; and let it so treat us—it can do us no real harm, and we shall soon be out of its reach. At the most a few more Advents, and with us the time of this mortal life will be ended. The night will indeed be gone, the day will indeed be begun. We shall want no earthly sunshine then, no rising sun to give us light; the Lord himself “will be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended.” “We shall rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost now and for ever.”

SERMON II.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

CHRIST PROCLAIMING HIS APPROACHING ADVENT.

REVELATION XXII. 20.—“He which testifieth these things, saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen; even so; come, Lord Jesus.”

WE can consider scarcely any prophecy of our Lord's first coming, without being constrained to wonder at the exactness with which it has been fulfilled. Just as certainly and minutely will all the predictions of his second coming be accomplished.

Here in the text is one of these predictions. It is the last that was ever given to the church, and it comes from Christ himself. We must examine, first, the declaration he makes in it, and then his apostle's answer.

I. *Our Lord's declaration*, you observe, is short, but yet very emphatic. Three ideas are conveyed to us by it.

1. *The speediness of his coming.* “I come quickly,” he says. And something like this is often said in scripture; “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh;” “The Lord is at hand;” “The Judge standeth before the door.”

But what, we naturally ask, is the meaning of this? Century after century has passed away since it was uttered, and still the Lord is not here. Why did he so often announce himself as about to come, yea, as already on his way? He did so perhaps for this reason—*because it seemed to him but a short time before his coming.*

Things are long or short, great or small, we all know, by comparison. A child born in a village, thinks that village a large place, for it has never seen a larger; but take a man who has traversed kingdoms and continents, he looks on it as it is. So with us. As far as time is concerned, we are children. We are accustomed to think of short intervals of time only, of

months and years, at the utmost of centuries. We cannot carry our minds over centuries without an effort. But he who is speaking here, is the Lord of eternity, one whose eye is accustomed to range over all the wide boundaries of time, and who can survey them all at a glance, with whom centuries are as minutes and ages as hours. In the thirteenth verse he tells us who he is; "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." And this too is St. Peter's explanation, not of this text, but of others like it; "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." The Lord, he implies, does not measure time as we measure it, nor look on it as we look on it; it is one thing to us, and another to him. Well then may he say, "I come quickly," for to his wide glancing eye there is but a little space between this promise and its fulfilment. The centuries that lie between, are as nothing in his sight.

Or we may take another explanation of the word. Our Lord may be understood as saying that whenever he comes, he will come *suddenly, unexpectedly*. Men in general, he may mean, shall not be looking for him at the time. The day of his coming shall be as quiet as any other day. The sun shall shine as brightly as ever; the air be as calm and silent; the foundations of the earth seem as firm. Nature shall give no sign of her approaching dissolution, nor heaven of its opening glories. The Lord will burst at once on the startled world. The trumpet shall sound one moment; the next, he will be before our eyes on his throne. The lightning that flashes suddenly across the sky; the thief that approaches a habitation stealthily and silently in the night—these, he tells us, represent the manner of his coming; and he tells us so, to put us on our guard, to keep alive in us a constant expectation of him. "Watch therefore," he says, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

There is yet a third interpretation to be given. The expression may intimate that *our Lord will come the instant he can come*.

We must remember where his words stand. Throughout this book, he has been laying open to John the future history of his church. This, he says, is to take place, and that to be done. His Father built the world to accomplish certain purposes in it, and they must be accomplished. At the close of all this we

read, "He which testifieth these things, saith, I come quickly." He means therefore, we may conclude, that after all the foregoing prophecies contained in this book are fulfilled, then he will come, come immediately, lose not a moment, come at once. He cannot come now. There yet remains much to be done in our world. There is the everlasting gospel to be preached to all nations, the mystical Babylon to be overthrown, Antichrist to be destroyed, the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, the number of God's elect to be accomplished; but let all this be once brought to pass, let the angel once lift up his hand to heaven and swear that the mystery of God is finished, let the way be once open for the Lord Jesus to come, and he will be here. He will come as quickly as love and joy can bring him. The next moment his people will hear his voice in the air, and behold him rending the clouds. He lingered not at his first coming, though he well knew that he was coming to a manger and a cross, to degradation, and misery, and death. "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son;" and that Son came forth more readily from his Father's kingdom, than the captive exile hastens from his dungeon. And will he not come as readily and quickly, when he comes to seat himself on the throne of his glory, and to gather together his redeemed?

2. This declaration announces next *the certainty of his coming*. He foretels it, you observe, in a very strong manner; "Surely I come quickly." He speaks like one who has made up his mind to come, and who knows that at a given time he can come, and who consequently is sure that he shall come.

His coming is certain, for *his mind is decided as to it*.

God never acts at random. All he does is the result of thought and design. He moreover never alters any one thing he has determined on, for he has no need to alter it. We cannot look before us, and are continually obliged to change our plans and conduct according to changing circumstances; but not so the all-wise God. He sees the end from the beginning, and forms his designs accordingly. He has nothing to alter. Only then let him determine on any thing, and that thing will inevitably come to pass.

Now there is nothing more determined on by him than the sending of his Son from heaven to judge our world. He has resolved to judge it; he has ordained him as its Judge; he has

appointed the very day when he is to go forth from him, and sit on his judgment-seat. So Paul told the Athenians; "He hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained." And knowing this to be the will of his Father, our Lord says here, "Surely I come quickly. Fear no disappointment. It is my Father's good pleasure that I should come; it is my own determination to come; and come I shall."

He knows too that he can come.

We purpose, and in some cases we do not change our minds. We continue resolved to carry our purposes into effect. But we cannot. Some unforeseen difficulty rises up in our way, and all our plans come to nothing. But what is to stand in the way of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he plans and purposes? If he says, "I will come," who shall hinder him? Go and beat back the ocean as the swelling tide rolls it on; stop the sun in his setting this evening, or put forth your arm and hold him down on the morrow as he begins to rise again in his majesty from his chambers of the east;—it would be more easily done than delaying one moment the great Saviour's advent. He will not be delayed; he cannot be hindered; therefore he says, "Surely I come. Come I can, and come I will." The event is certain, for he has firmly purposed it, and all that he purposes, he has power to accomplish.

3. Observe another thing intimated here—*the importance of our Lord's coming*; its importance, I mean, in his own estimation.

We ministers sometimes preach of it, and you frequently hear of it, as though it were a matter of trifling moment. It is a long way off, we think, and as yet the prospect of it need not trouble us. But not so Christ. While he was on earth, he was continually bringing it before the minds of his disciples, and urging on them its importance; and he speaks of it here from heaven, as though it still seemed to him of the utmost moment. He is just going, as it were, to leave us; he is just about to let his voice be heard for the last time on earth, till he calls up the dead with it; thousands of years are to pass away before he will speak to us again; and what is the last thing he says? It is not, "Remember me. Though you neither see me nor hear me, yet think of me." It is, "I shall certainly come again. Surely I come quickly." And he says this, observe, in this con-

cluding chapter of his holy word three times over; first in the seventh verse, then in the twelfth, and then here. And it is also worthy of remark, that very frequently in scripture when he speaks of his coming, he introduces what he says with the word, "Behold," as though to draw our attention to it, and stamp it with importance; "Behold, I come quickly;" "Behold, I come as a thief;" "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." And he causes his apostles to do the same. "Behold, he cometh with clouds," says one. "Behold," says another, "the Judge standeth before the door."

Now all this implies that when he comes, he will not come for any ordinary purpose. He will not come to astonish our world, or to make an empty display in it of his power and glory, or to bring about some slight changes in its condition; he will come on an errand that fills his own soul with emotion as he contemplates it. And therefore the day of his coming is, in his view of it, the most momentous of all days. It is never out of his mind. He closes the word of his testimony with telling us of it. Would, brethren, that we all regarded it as he does! True, he is deeply interested in it, but we more. What is the day of trial to the judge, when compared to what it is to the criminals who are to be tried in it? But yet in this case the Judge thinks much of it, the criminals little. O pray for yourselves, that before it arrives, you may feel its importance!

II. Let us pass on now to the other part of the text—the *apostle's answer* to this declaration of his Lord.

If you will look at the verse, you will see that the word "Amen" which occurs in it, is included in most of your bibles among our Lord's words: the full stop is placed after it. But perhaps it is more natural to place the stop before it, and to take the word as forming a part of the following reply. Then the case will stand thus. Christ speaks from heaven and says, "Surely I come quickly." The apostle hears him, and how is he affected? What does he answer? We should have said perhaps, He will give no answer at all; he will receive the solemn declaration with awe and silence. But no; he immediately answers his Lord, and in such a way as shews he has heard something which has given him pleasure. His reply is a complete echo to his Master's declaration. It is expressive of the most cordial acquiescence in his coming, and also of a very



strong desire for it. "Amen," he says; "amen; even so; come, Lord Jesus."

You remember what is said to Christ in one of the prophetic psalms; "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." See here a fulfilment of this prophecy. How complete is their willingness! His people are not only made willing to come to Christ at first for salvation, willing to be cleansed in his blood and sanctified by his Spirit, willing to follow him wherever he leads them, but here at last they are willing to be judged by him; willing for him to come in his glory and to call them to his bar. All other men dread his coming. They think of it, if they think of it at all, with apprehension and pain. They would rejoice were he never to come, and they never to see him. But turn to those who have found pardon in the blood of Jesus, and know they have found it—there is not one among them, who would not join, and join with his whole soul, in the language of this apostle. "Amen," they would say, every one of them; "even so; come, Lord Jesus. Once we scarcely ever thought of thy coming. We heard of it with as much unconcern as though we had nothing to do with it. And when it pleased thee by thy Spirit to remove this indifference from us, we did not at once desire thine appearing. Nay, we trembled as we thought of it. We would have given thousands of worlds, had they been ours, to keep thee away for ever. But now—O blessed be thy power and grace! we are willing for thee to come; we long for thee to come, and to come as quickly as thou wilt. There is nothing we desire so much as thy coming. Our wearied souls often ache for thy coming. It is our chief joy that thou wilt come, and that we shall see thee at thy coming. Come, Lord Jesus; come as thou sayest thou wilt, quickly."

Not that every real Christian can at all times speak thus. The holiest perhaps of Christ's servants may sometimes think for an hour of his Master's coming with a strange indifference, and then contemplate it for another hour with a mixture of alarm and terror; but still this is not the usual frame of his mind; he does not settle down in these feelings. There is a tendency in the grace he has received, to make him long for his Saviour; and long for him he does, and for his appearing. He is habitually in the attitude of a servant who is waiting for his Lord.



But why do the people of Christ thus desire the coming of Christ? For several reasons—

1. *Because they desire to see this evil and miserable world come to an end.*

“I shall soon die,” says the Christian in some of his moments, “and then what will matter to me the world’s crimes and the world’s miseries? They vex and pain me now almost beyond endurance, but the time is short. They will soon be no more to me than the storms that will beat on my grave.” These however are not the man’s best moments. At other times, he feels that it is not enough for him to make his own escape from the windy storm and tempest; he longs for the storm to cease and the tempest to be still. He looks on the world as no other man looks on it. It is in his eye a world in which his own fellow-creatures, his companions and brethren, are sinning, and suffering, and perishing; a world in which his own fellow-christians, men of whom such a place is not worthy, are trampled on and despised; a world where his own God is dishonoured, and the Saviour he adores set at nought. He sees it a world of disorder and crime and havoc and misery, a strange dark blot in God’s wonderful creation; and the consequence is, he desires to see an everlasting end put to it. Like that creation itself, he well nigh groans for the hour, when his Redeemer shall come from the skies and dash it in pieces. That man has not a Christian heart, who says, “I do not care what the world is when I am gone from it.” He has no Christian feeling at all within him, who would not rejoice to look around him and say, “That world of sin and misery is gone. Satan has lost a kingdom. It can dishonour my God no more.” “The morning stars,” we are told, “sang together” when the foundations of the earth were laid, “and all the sons of God shouted for joy;” but there will be a louder shout among them when the earth is destroyed, and a more joyful song.

2. The believer desires the coming of his Lord, *because he desires exceedingly to see him put on his glory.*

There is a feeling in every godly soul, of which no other soul knows any thing. It is a feeling of intense love for its Saviour; not a cold reverence merely, nor a high admiration, nor even a warm, glowing gratitude; it goes beyond all these. It is a feeling of oneness with Christ; something within us, which makes his name and his glory very dear to us, and causes us to be

deeply affected by every thing that we know affects him. Love an earthly friend intensely, a child or brother, a husband or wife, and you have the affection I mean. Now put a feeling like this for the Lord Jesus into your hearts, and it is easy to say why you will wish for his appearing. He will come, you will tell us, in his glory. He will come to be glorified and admired; therefore we long for his coming. O how was he treated the last time he came here! and how have his name, and his gospel, and his people, been treated ever since! But yet a little, and they who have dishonoured him, shall dishonour him no more. The very men who despised and rejected him; the men who scourged and spat on him; the men who now, if they could, would tear him from his throne—they shall all, yea, and the hosts of hell with them, they shall all fall down before him, all be forced to say of him, “He is indeed the Lord.” And what will his own people say of him in that triumphant hour? O to hear their song when it first bursts from their lips after they are gathered round him, and the songs of the wondering angels as they first look on them standing all pure and glorious in one vast assembly before his throne! And then to witness the joy that will break forth from his own soul as he says at last, “It is finished. The work is done. Those whom my Father gave me, I have kept; not one of them is lost. They are all here, and without a sorrow or a sin among them all.” Can we think of this scene, and not say with this apostle, “Amen, amen; even so; come, Lord Jesus?”

3. And once again. The believer desires the coming of Christ, because *he desires to be more closely united to him.*

Here he is one with him, and he feels at times that he is so; but even in these happy seasons, he feels also that he might be nearer to him, and there are other seasons when he is ready to think himself utterly separated from him. He cannot see him, he cannot find him. “O that I knew where I might find him!” he says. “O the hope of Israel,” he cries, “the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?” Ask him to describe his condition in the world, he will generally say with St. Paul, “While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord;” it is a state of absence and distance from him whom his soul most loves. The church is already the bride of Christ, but then at present she is no more

than betrothed and contracted to him. And this is one reason why she longs for his coming—it will be the perfecting of her espousals with him. He will come as her Bridegroom to take her to his home. “Then indeed,” says the soul, “shall I feel that he is mine. Often and often now I have no more enjoyment of him, than as though I had nothing to do with him; and when he does draw near to me and I do hold some blessed communion with him, there is a veil still between us. I see him not, and his visit is soon over. He comes to gladden me for a moment, and the next moment he is gone. But when he once appears in his glory, farewell for ever to veils, and distance, and separations. I shall see his face; I shall have a full and constant and everlasting fruition of him; for ever and for ever I shall be with him. What shall I say then, when he tells me he is coming quickly? What can I say, but, Amen; even so; come, Lord, quickly?”

For these three reasons then the believer looks forward with joy to his Redeemer’s advent. He desires it for the world’s sake, that an end may be put to its crimes and miseries; for his Lord’s sake, that his glory may be full; and for his own sake, that he may see his Lord, and be, in body and in spirit, ever with him.

And now let me say, Christian brethren, *it would be well for us to be every hour in this state of expectation and desire.* It is exactly that frame of mind, which we need among the trials of life, yes, and among its temptations also. Were it constantly ours, we should not be so ready to complain of our light afflictions, nor should we be so often falling into evil. A man looking upwards for his Lord, is in a safe as well as in a blessed state. He can withstand sin, if any man can withstand it, and he can bear trouble, if any man can bear it.

And *we may be in this state of mind.* It is an attainable, as well as a desirable state. We need not the heavenly visions which John saw, to bring us into it. The sound of our Master’s voice, or a sight of our Master’s glory, is not necessary to produce it. It comes from a simple faith in him as an all-sufficient Saviour. Would we have it? We must look at him on the cross in order to get it, and look at him as one who offered there a complete, and glorious, and accepted atonement for our sins. And we must do this frequently, and go on doing it, till we do

it almost unconsciously and habitually ; till faith in Christ grows strong within us, and becomes hope in Christ, and a hope that settles into confidence. A self-righteous man can never have a real desire for his Lord's coming, a man with an accusing conscience cannot have it, nor can an unbelieving, a desponding, or a doubting man. None can have it, but those who are seeking in downright earnest the salvation of their souls through the blood of Jesus, and who believe that through his blood they have found it. You may tell me that a faith like this is very uncommon in the world. I know it is, brethren. Would that it were not ! But if you are without it, a guilty malefactor might as well attempt to long for the coming of his judge, or the worn out mariner in a shattered bark, far from a port, long for the hurricane and the storm, as you long for the coming of your Lord.

And I may add too, that if we are really Christ's true disciples, *we ought to be in this state of mind.*

We look forward to the second coming of the Lord Jesus as a solemn and awful event, and such it will doubtless be ; but see in what light this apostle regarded it—as an event to be desired. And see, in the nineteenth chapter of this book, in what light the “great multitude” in heaven regard it—as a most joyful event. It is a marriage, they say, a blissful meeting and union between the Lord and his church, and they call on one another to be glad and rejoice in it. And Christ himself speaks of it in exactly the same terms. This, he says, is the cry that shall announce his appearing, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh.” And what he wants from his people is, that they should recognize him in this character as they think of his appearing, that they should long to welcome him as a Bridegroom, that they should be prepared to enter into his feelings and participate in his delight. “Lift up your heads with joy,” he says to them. “You are going to a marriage-feast, and you must go there not only with a wedding-garment, but with a wedding-spirit ; with a heart full of love towards me and expectation from me ; with a soul that can glory even now in my glory, and find its noblest happiness in the contemplation and anticipation of my joy.”

But what a different heart is this, brethren, to that which is now beating within some of you ! I appeal to your consciences. Were you told that this very night the trumpet should sound from heaven, and you be called on to meet your descending Lord, would the tidings be welcomed by you as happy tidings ?

Or were you even told that you must die to-night, and so go to meet him, would you rejoice? Would you at once say, "O let me go? I long to depart and be with Christ." Would you not rather cry out, "O let me go any where rather than to him? I will go to the wildest part of the globe, the burning tropics or the frozen poles; I will live in the gloomiest habitation in the gloomiest land; I will never again see the light of day, and, if it must be so, I will never hear again the voice of man; but that summons into my Saviour's presence, let me not hear that yet; that eternity where he dwells, let me not go there; that Bridegroom, save me from meeting him. There is not a being in the whole universe, from whom I so much wish to flee. The day of death, the day of judgment, a day of joy? O no; it is to me a day of terror. I should rejoice were such a day never to arrive." And this state of feeling too plainly stamps your character. It proves almost as clearly as the most ungodly tempers or unholy life, that you are not the redeemed of the Lord; that as yet there is no communion or fellowship between him and you. "Surely," he says, "I come quickly;" and what is your answer? "Lord, keep away: we dread thy coming?" O brethren, this will never do. To die in such a state as this, is to wake up in anguish. To meet our coming Lord in such a state, is more terrible than your fears can paint it. And yet, in this state or in a worse, you will die and you will meet him, unless you flee to him now as a mighty Saviour. It is sin, that makes death and judgment fearful to you. That is the great evil which stands in your way to hope and happiness; and how is it to be removed? It never will be removed till, as miserable sinners, you cast yourselves down before your once crucified Lord, and implore him to remove it; to clothe you in his righteousness and cleanse you in his blood.

SERMON III.

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE LORD COMING TO HIS TEMPLE.

MALACHI III. 1.—“Behold, I will send my Messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.”

THE predictions which announced to the ancient church its coming Saviour, may seem now to have done their work. Their importance and usefulness ceased, we may think, with their fulfilment. But not so in fact. There is still much in them to interest, instruct, and delight us. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay,” said the angel to the women after his resurrection. The same we may now say to you of these fulfilled prophecies. They are to us as empty sepulchres which the Lord has done with, but who with a Christian heart, can contemplate them without wonder and joy?

Here before us is a two-fold prediction. We have a forerunner of Christ announced in it, and then Christ himself.

I. The text announces *a forerunner of Christ*. And it tells us two things concerning him—his mission from God, and the work he is to perform.

1. “Behold, I will send my messenger”—there is *his divine mission*.

We know who is meant. Our Lord himself refers to this passage, and says that it points to John the Baptist. And observe the honour it puts on him. It not only describes him as in the mind of God before his appearance, and as specially appointed by God to his office, but it makes him, like his great Master himself, the subject of prophecy, and an object of expectation for ages to the church. And it is remarkable that Christ himself, in quoting this prophecy, seems to have the

dignity of John especially in his thoughts, for he immediately afterwards speaks of it; "Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

It was however no personal pre-eminence, that so peculiarly distinguished this man. We are not to suppose that he was holier than the prophets before him, or more faithful and zealous. No, he was nearer to Christ; he testified more plainly and fully of him. Instead of looking on him through a succession of centuries and speaking of him as one that should come, he saw him face to face, and declared he was come. This gave him his pre-eminence. Our Lord accordingly adds, "He that is least in the kingdom of heaven," the gospel-dispensation, "is greater than he." The lowest minister that now names the name of Christ, excels John, just as John excelled those before him. He understands the gospel better; more of it is revealed to him; he can testify to his fellow-sinners more clearly and fully of the grace of God.

2. Observe too *the work this forerunner was sent to perform*; "He shall prepare the way before me."

It is a common practice in eastern countries, to send on a messenger before any great personage to make known his approach, to remove all obstructions out of his way, and to prepare the people he is coming to for a due reception of him. And thus came John, sustaining the character and doing the work of the herald of Christ. "Thou, child," said Zacharias, his father, to him as soon as he was born, "shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." And Isaiah, long before he was born, had predicted the same concerning him; "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." The meaning of both declarations is, that the preaching of the Baptist should not only lead men to expect the Messiah, but should prepare their hearts to receive him. And it really bore this character.

What was it, brethren, that first led some of you to seek Christ and welcome him? Was it not a consciousness of sin, a sense of God's anger, a dread of merited destruction? Now examine John's preaching, and you will find it calculated to produce just these effects. He went about Judæa, as the prophet Jonah had before gone about the devoted Nineveh, crying

every where, "Repent, repent ye." There is a sermon of his in the third chapter of St. Matthew, and what is the burden of it? The danger the people were in, their nearness to the wrath to come, the utter insufficiency of all their spiritual privileges to deliver them. "The axe," he says, "is laid unto the root of the trees." There is One coming, "whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor;" "he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." You say to us sometimes, brethren, "Preach to us of the love of God, of the Saviour's grace and heaven's blessedness;" and O that we had nothing else to preach of! but some of you are guilty sinners, and do not know it; many of you are perishing in your sins, and do not feel it. If we would deliver our own souls or save yours, we must often preach to you of a broken law, of coming wrath, a descending Judge, and an opening hell. There must be trembling sinners in this place and broken hearts. Then, and not till then, the way of Christ will be prepared here; then his gospel will be really valued here, and he himself welcomed and received.

II. We find next in this passage *a prediction of Christ*; "The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." And here also we have two points to notice.

1. *The names applied to Christ.*

He is "*the Lord*," the Lord of the temple. Mark the emphatic pronoun—he "shall come to *his* temple."

In what a short and simple way does the Holy Spirit thus assert the Redeemer's Godhead! He is the same, he says, for whom the tabernacle was pitched in the wilderness, and to whom the mighty structure in Jerusalem was reared; the same who filled that structure with his glory at its dedication, and afterwards dwelt and shone forth in it above the mercy-seat. He is the same that all Israel bowed down to in its courts, before whom the sacrifice was offered, and the incense smoked, and the prayer went up, and the psalm rose. "The Lord of the temple shall come," says the Spirit, Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, the one only living and true God.

And go back again to the first clause of the text. The same great truth may be discovered there also. "He shall prepare the way before me," says the speaker; and who is the speaker?

"The Lord of hosts," says the end of the verse. And whose way is John to prepare? "Mine," says Christ in other places; "it is my way that is to be made ready in that desert world." The three evangelists who quote the words, all give them this application. What then can be more clear, than that Christ the Messiah, and the Lord of hosts, are one and the same? Blessed be God that this glorious truth so runs through his word! We meet it where we look not for it. O may we feel more and more the power and comfort of it!

But here is another name applied to Christ, a lowly one—*"the Messenger of the covenant."*

John was a messenger, and now the Lord Jesus also, in his turn, is called a messenger, and for this reason—he sustains in relation to the covenant a similar character to that which John sustained towards himself. He is God's servant, sent into our world on an errand connected with God's covenant of grace.

You know, brethren, what this covenant is. It is a gracious term applied by Jehovah to the promises he has given his people to bless and save them. It shows them the stability of these promises, and the fixed purpose of God to perform them. He binds himself by it to perform them; it is a pledging of his glorious character for their accomplishment. And O how rich are they and precious!—all needful things in time, and all the soul can enjoy or possess in eternity, for every sinner who accepts the well-beloved Son of God for his Saviour!

And Christ is called the Messenger of this covenant, because he it is, who makes it known. He first openly proclaimed it, and it is still he, who, by his word and ministers and Spirit, reveals to us the blessings it contains. He also, in his human nature, is the instrument employed by Jehovah in carrying it into effect. By him he accomplishes its great designs, imparts its mercies, and makes good its promises. "The law was given by Moses," says John; Moses may be considered as the messenger of the first covenant; but the second covenant, the covenant of "grace and truth, came by Jesus Christ." This was too glorious a thing to be entrusted to a prophet or an angel. "Prophets shall darkly foretell it," says Christ; "the angels shall talk of it and sing of it; but I myself will go down to that fallen world, and proclaim it. I now will be the messenger." And into our world he came, the Servant of Jehovah, revealing his purposes, and manifesting wherever he came his

mercy and love. Hence St. John says again, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

And just observe the happy blending together in these two names of the Redeemer's greatness and lowliness. He is the Lord of the temple, but yet a Messenger; the Lord of hosts, and yet a Servant. And something like this is continually occurring in the prophets, especially in Isaiah. Is the Messiah "a Child born and a Son given?" In the next moment he is "the everlasting Father and the mighty God." Is he a Shepherd, feeding his flock with a shepherd's care and tenderness, "carrying the lambs in his bosom, and gently leading those that are with young?" He is immediately described as "measuring the waters in the hollow of his hand, spanning the heavens, weighing the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance." "All nations before him" are said to be "as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity." And thus the Spirit teaches us how to look on our Lord—with a thrilling reverence, and yet with a fearless confidence; to walk with him as a companion, and guide, and familiar friend, and yet to be so impressed with his greatness, as to deem it a wonder we can walk with him at all; to come boldly to his throne, as though we were coming into a father's or a brother's presence, and then to fall down before him on his throne, as creatures unworthy to behold his face. "The Lord's delight," we read, "is in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy;" and in this way, among others, he works in us by his Spirit the hope and fear he delights in.

2. Another thing to be noticed in this prediction, is *the appearing of Christ in our world*—the place of his appearing, the manner, and the certainty of it.

Mark *the place*—he shall come to "his temple."

In the last three of the prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, we read often of the temple. The reason is, at the time they wrote, it was much in men's thoughts. The first prophesied to stir up the Jews to rebuild it; the second wrote while it was rebuilding, to encourage them to proceed; the third after it was finished, to censure the people for profaning it. In their predictions therefore of the Messiah, the temple is often mixed up, and these predictions are thus made to correspond with the general character of their preaching. "You make light of this

sacred building," said Malachi; "you pollute and profane it; but the Lord Jehovah honours it, and will one day come to it." And come to it he did. Thither he was brought in his very infancy. There old Simeon clasped him in his arms, and with joyful lips acknowledged him as the "glory of Israel." We read of him there in his boyhood, lingering among the doctors. There he preached many of his sermons after he began his ministry, and wrought many of his wonderful works. There also on two occasions he laid bare his greatness. "This is my Father's house," he cried, and swept from its hallowed courts with his single arm the dismayed multitudes that were profaning it. As he stood alone on these two occasions, when the work was done, in calm but fearful majesty, no one daring to touch him, a thoughtful Jew must surely have discovered in him something more than human. He must have been ready to take up the language of this prophecy and say, "the Lord is indeed come to his temple."

And mark the predicted *manner* of his appearing—"suddenly."

The Messiah was generally expected by the Jewish nation at the time when he came, but he was not expected in the form and manner in which he appeared. Their notions of him were all low and earthly. Had any one told them that he was about to enter his temple, they would have looked for him at the head of conquering armies and shouting multitudes; or else, if their thoughts rose higher, they would have expected the heavens to be rent, and a chariot of blazing glory to bring him to the earth. When therefore the infant Jesus was carried into the temple as a lowly babe by lowly peasants, he came, as it were, suddenly upon them, unlooked for and unknown; in an hour that they thought not of, and in a character they did not anticipate.

This scripture declares also *the certainty* of his advent. To strengthen the promise, there is a repetition of the prediction; "Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."

Many hundred years had now passed since God had first given to Abraham the promise of a Saviour, and doubtless many of Abraham's children had often wondered why the Saviour so long promised had not come; but these rolling centuries, though they had delayed his coming, had not changed the divine purpose. The Lord was still of the same mind. None had turned him, and none could turn him. His language still was, "He

shall come." In his own time, he says, he will send forth a Deliverer.

And now, brethren, let me put to you three questions.

What reception have you given to this heaven-descended Saviour?

Look again to the text. I might have gone on with it, and told you that it contains, besides a prediction of John and another of Christ, a description of Christ's people. It points them out as men who seek this Lord of the temple, and delight in this Messenger of the covenant. He is welcome to them beyond all telling, and precious beyond all price. Are you, brethren, men of this character? Have you ever, with trembling knees and a broken heart, sought a Saviour? Has there ever been a period in your history, in which you have felt you must find one? Would you even now sacrifice all the world to see yourselves pardoned, and accepted, and safe in Christ? And do you delight in him? really and deeply delight in him? Whence comes your chief happiness—from heaven or from earth? from man or from Christ? Whom do you love best and rejoice in most—some fellow-worm or the everlasting Jesus? If the everlasting Jesus, O let a few more short years run their course, and how will your inmost souls then delight in him! "My soul doth magnify the Lord," cried Mary with a burst of joy, as her friend talked to her of the coming Christ; "my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." But O the tide of joy that will flow into your hearts, when your feet stand in heaven, and you with your own eyes behold your Lord! Now you know something of what delight in him means, or think you know; but what is it? No more like what you will then feel, than an uncertain, shallow rivulet is like the swelling Nile or the fathomless sea.

With what feelings and expectations do you come up to this house of the Lord?

The temple at Jerusalem has long since been destroyed, and the Lord of that temple, in his bodily presence, has left our world; but he has still temples here. He deems every place his house, where his name is recorded and his gospel published; and you remember his promise, "I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." He also remembers this promise; yea, he fulfils it. Sabbath after sabbath he comes into our churches

as really as he entered his temple of old. His glory is seen in them, his voice heard, his power felt, his goodness tasted, the savour of his name shed abroad. There his people sometimes rejoice in him, just as old Simeon rejoiced when he held him in his arms at Jerusalem; they feel as happy, and could as willingly leave all and die.

Brethren, is this your object in coming up to this church? Do you come here in the hope that the Lord of this house will come here with you, and that you may spiritually see him? Have you ever known here what spiritual communion with an unseen Saviour means, and do you long to know it again? To bring Christ and the soul together—that is the one great design of churches, and ministers, and sermons, and ordinances. You are to come here seeking Christ; we ministers are to come, that, in the Spirit's power, we may prepare your hearts to receive him. He is a poor minister, he is good for nothing, who never makes you feel here that you need Christ; and think what you will of him, he is a good minister and a faithful one, who disturbs your consciences, and forces you to feel that you must find Christ or perish. May the Lord of this house incline every one of you to seek him! O that he would fill this place with men that delight in him!

And one question more—*How stand you prepared for the future coming of the Lord?*

Many of the prophecies of scripture have a double bearing. This probably has. It seems meant to be a standing prophecy to the church. To the ancient church, it predicted the first advent of the Messiah; to us, the second. And this accounts for the question with which the awe-struck Malachi follows up his prophecy. He does not say with Isaiah, "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it." He does not cry out with Zacharias, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people." No; he thinks of a descending Judge as well as Saviour, and says, "Who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?" He goes on to speak of the searching, and discriminating, and consuming effects of his coming; "He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap." And this, in some measure, he is even now. The gospel that we preach to you, tries, and distinguishes, and marks you. It divides you into two great classes, and, in one way or another, it often makes evident to others, and perhaps to

yourselves, to which of these classes you belong. But O the heart-searching scrutiny of that day, when this scripture shall be fully accomplished! The Lord will once more come suddenly to his temple, and what a division will he make among us then! what an awful severing!—every man appearing in his real character and taking his right place; some on this side the throne, some on that; some wondering at their happiness and eager in the very presence of their Judge to break forth into the song that will know no end, others shrinking with horror before their sentence is pronounced, and feeling before they hear it, a terrible despair.

Brethren, are you ready for this day? Are you prepared to meet it? Where will you be when it comes, and the great line is at last drawn? We can tell you where you may be. O blessed truth! there is not a sinner among you, who may not now seek and find in the Lord Jesus a willing Saviour: and there is not one of us, who may not lift up his head with joy when he sees him on his throne, and take a joyful place at his right hand. Even John, the forerunner of the Messiah, the preacher of repentance, tells you this or something like this. Pointing to the Lord Jesus, he says to you, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." And what can we say, his present messengers and servants? All you can wish us. Do you behold him, do you believe in him, and he will most surely take away your sin. You may as peacefully abide his coming, as though you were spotless angels. You will as certainly stand in the great day of his appearing, as Abraham, or David, or Paul.

SERMON IV.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

CHRIST A REFUGE.

ISAIAH XXXII. 2.—“A Man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.”

THIS was once prophecy, it is now fact. That strange thing which the prophet foretold should be, is actually come to pass. He is looking forward to a day of gospel-grace and blessedness. We are living in that day, and here is one of the many wonders of grace proclaimed to us in it. A Man is now a hiding place from the wind; there is a covert open to us from every tempest. Blessed indeed are all they who are sheltered in it!

I. We are reminded here of *our dangers*.

These are set forth by images which we in our climate can only half understand. Except at sea, we have little to fear from winds and tempests. At the worst, they are inconveniences to us, seldom dangers. But in other countries, they are at times the causes of great havoc. A few years only have passed, since one of our own colonies was turned into a scene of complete desolation by their violence. The dwellings of the inhabitants were scattered about in ruins, and the produce of their fields torn up and destroyed. In Judæa where the scriptures were written, their effects are much dreaded. The country is situated near the dreary regions of the Arabian deserts. Across these the winds often sweep with irresistible fury, raising up in their progress lofty columns of sand, which they drive forward, threatening to overwhelm the affrighted traveller. And besides these, there are gentler winds sometimes blowing in them, that are almost as fearful. Hot and debilitating, they cannot be breathed without much suffering, and instances, it is said, have been known, in which they have been so noxious as to occasion death.

The latter part of the verse shews us, that the prophet in writing it had a scene of this kind in his mind. He places us in one of these dry, dreary, and storm-troubled deserts. "There," he says, "in that raging hurricane, and there in that suffocating, withering blast, is a picture of the dangers with which you are threatened. The world you are living in, is a desert, a waste and howling one, and you are exposed, every one of you, to its winds and tempests."

And is not this, brethren, a true picture of our situation? Some of you may say you think not, but who are you that say so? The young among you, those who know very little of the world and very little of yourselves. Wait a few years, get a little farther into the wilderness, become better acquainted with what is passing in it—it is well if you do not find yourselves ready to say, "Would that we had never entered it! Would that we could escape at once from its troubled scenes!"

There are storms of outward affliction for us in the world, many of them; as soon as one is laid to rest, another is ready to blow. And if we are God's servants, he generally leads us where these storms blow the most frequently, and are the most violent. He seems to direct them towards us, and to give them fresh power and fury as they approach us. Some of us are scarcely allowed to know what a calm means.

And there are inward storms also—storms of conscience, storms of temptation; and still worse storms than any of these—the ragings of our own corrupt affections. And yet what are all these? They are all nothing compared with one storm yet to come. There is the wrath of God awaiting us. We are sinners, and God has denounced his anger against sinners. The storms of life, keen as we find them, do not satisfy his awful justice; there is another tempest to beat on us when we die, and long after we are dead—a pouring out without measure of God's righteous indignation against our sins, an everlasting storm of devouring fire. O how strangely, brethren, do we lose sight of this! We ministers preach to you for weeks together as though the troubles of this life were all you would ever have to bear, and you expect us to preach so. You talk one to another as though your worldly losses and disappointments, your family and private troubles were your only troubles; but as surely as there is the grave before us, there are heavier troubles before us than any we have yet experienced. We forget

the wrath to come. May the living God cure us of this forgetfulness! May he lead us, one and all, to look around for a shelter before the great tempest of his fury bursts!

But turn again to the text.

II. It tells us of a *Protector from our dangers*.

And who is he? If we understand what our dangers are, we shall all say he must be the great God. None other can effectually shelter us. But the text does not say this. It tells us that he is a man; "A Man shall be as an hiding place and a covert." But how, we may ask, can this be? We have tried often enough to get help from men. It is to our fellow-men we look the oftenest for shelter and help when the storm beats on us. We cannot keep from looking to them. But, alas! what have they done for us? All perhaps they could do, but it has been well nigh nothing, nothing amid the petty ills of life, and what can they possibly do for us among eternal ills? And yet the prophet bids us look again for help to man, and all of us to one Man; and well he may. This Man is such a man as never before was seen or heard of, the everlasting Jehovah manifest in our mortal flesh, God and man united in one Christ.

But why is the Lord Jesus called so pointedly and emphatically a Man in this passage? Perhaps for three reasons.

1. *To lead the ancient church to expect his incarnation.*

The living God had hitherto been their Protector and their only sure Protector. They had looked for help elsewhere, but they had suffered severely for doing so, and had been often reproved by God himself for doing so. He had told them through age after age, that he only was their refuge, and that it was a dishonour done to him, to his love and greatness, to make any but him their confidence. "Cease ye from man," had been his constant language to them; "cursed is he that maketh flesh his arm." When therefore they find him suddenly changing his language, telling them that a time should come when a man should be their helper, and bidding them look to him for help, they must naturally have said, "What meaneth this?" The prophecies of yet earlier days would probably recur to them. They would think of that seed of the woman, who was to bruise the serpent's head; of that seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; and thus the expectation of Jehovah himself becoming incarnate for their salvation,

would find its way into their minds ; they would anticipate his coming in human form to be their Saviour.

2. And it may be that the Lord Jesus is called a man here *to encourage us to approach him.*

We naturally are afraid of God ; we shrink from approaching him. Besides, the storms from which we want a refuge, are raised against us by God. We have incensed him against us by our transgressions, and we dare not look to him for shelter. So feels every conscience-stricken soul. But here, says this text, is God appearing before you in a new character and form. Behold, he takes on him your own character and form. He comes to you as a man ; he speaks to you as a man ; and why ? To let you see that he is still full of compassion for your guilty souls ; to shew you that though his storms are desolating the world, and he, in his righteous anger, will not stop them, yet he has a heart full of pity for the world, and even in his wrath is thinking upon mercy. When we consider for one moment who God is, his manifestation in our flesh, his mere appearance in our world as a man, proclaims him at once man's Friend and Saviour. We scarcely require one word from him to encourage us to approach him. His awful justice is not so visible in the wildest storm of his displeasure, as his love is visible in his human nature and form.

3. But the chief reason for the application of this title to him, probably is *to shew us the importance of his human nature to our safety.*

The importance to us of his divine nature is clear. He could be no Saviour to us were he not the mighty God. And we need no arguments to convince us of this. The instant the Holy Spirit discovers to us our spiritual dangers, we feel it. And hence it is that the divinity of our Lord is so seldom directly asserted in the scriptures. Their object seems rather to be to prove him to be indeed and in truth man. But the text, you observe, goes farther than this. It not only declares the reality of his manhood, it intimates also its importance. It not only says, "He who will save you is a man," but it so says it, as to let us see that his manhood will have much to do with saving us. It is referred to in a very marked manner. Our attention is called to it. The prophet does not say, "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness, and that King shall be your hiding place," he says, "A Man shall be your hiding place." When we are

asked therefore what it is in Christ, that is the protection of his people, we do not exclude his Godhead ; we should tremble to do so. To that everlasting Rock we must all fly, and in the clefts of that Rock we must seek our safety. Many a storm have some of us weathered there, yea, and almost smiled at as we weathered it. But it is, as it were, through his human nature, that we have gone into these clefts. We feel that we could not have found our way into them, but through this. And ask us where we hide ourselves the oftenest, where we feel ourselves the most safe, where, when the storm beats the heaviest, we feel that we must hide, we shall all say with one voice, "It is in the Man Christ Jesus, in the incarnate, and suffering, and bleeding, and dying Son of God."

In fact, brethren, the truth implied in this text, is no other than that which is so often stated in holy scripture in the plainest possible terms. Just as the manhood of Christ is insisted on there more than his Godhead, so our salvation is ascribed to his degradation and sufferings, more frequently than to his power and greatness. Both are needful for our salvation, but we are less ready to think his sufferings so, therefore we are the oftener told to look to them for our salvation. "By his stripes," it is said, "we are healed." It is his blood that "cleanseth us from all sin." Not through his riches, but "through his poverty," we are to be made rich. And in heaven when the work is done, when the last storm has blown and all around is one wide blessed calm, what shall be said then ? The rejoicing church, with all the glory of its Saviour in open vision before it, shall still look back to the manger and the cross, and say, "It was there he saved us. Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

III. We may come now to a third point—the *excellence of that protection which the Lord Jesus affords us.*

Imagine yourselves, brethren, in such a desert as the prophet has here in his mind. There comes sweeping towards you the furious whirlwind. One thing only fills your thoughts—"Where can I find a shelter?" Now suppose yourselves asked in such a moment as this, what kind of a shelter you wished for, you would naturally say, in the first place, it must be a *secure* one. You would point to the tempest that was coming on, and say, "It must be strong enough to shield me

from that." And Christ is a secure hiding place. In consequence of what he has done and suffered in his human nature, and of what he is still doing in that nature, he is "able to save," and "to save to the uttermost, all that come unto him." We are to turn to him as to "a strong hold;" not as to an accidental shelter, a house or a common building that may or may not be able to protect us, but as to "a hold," a fortress, a place built for safety, and "a strong hold," a fortress built in anticipation of furious attacks and storms and able to abide them.

And then you would say, "The refuge I want must be a *near* one." It matters nothing to a man in a storm how secure a hiding place may be, if it is far away from him. To be of any service to him, it must be close at hand; he must be able to get to it. And who so near at hand as the Lord Jesus? Be we where we may in this howling wilderness, we are always within a step of this blessed covert. In a moment at any time we may flee into it and be secure from evil. Some of us however only half believe this. How often do we say, it is useless for us to expect mercy, or comfort, or some other blessing, in a situation like ours! And when we do look up to Christ for the help we want in trouble, how commonly do we look to him as one far off from us! "O that I knew where I might find him!" says many a troubled soul. But the truth is, that Christ could not be nearer his afflicted people than he always is. Our refuge, if we will but enter it, is always as near to us as our danger; it is sometimes nearer. There, but a little way off, comes the overwhelming storm; but here, not a little way off, close to us, at our right hand, within one step of us, is our hiding place. The happy psalmist well knew this. "God is our refuge and strength," he says; not a present, but a "very present help in trouble." Speaking of the church, he says again, not "God is near her;" but "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early."

But you may ask, "Can I gain admittance into this refuge if I flee to it?" The answer is, You can. It is an *open* refuge, a refuge ever open, and open to all who choose to enter it. None who flee to it, are denied access to it. Look through this parish—we could find hundreds here who need a shelter, and will soon be undone for ever if they do not secure one. Look over the wide world—O what multitudes do we see, millions on millions, suffering and perishing in it! In Christ there is room

enough to shelter them all, and one is just as welcome to enter into him for shelter as another. His mercy is large, his merits infinite, his offers free, his invitations as gracious and extensive as we can desire them or he can make them. "Look unto me," he says, "and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." "Who-soever believeth in me shall be saved." There is no casting out of any one who is hid in Christ; there is no keeping out of any one who wishes to hide himself in him. And it does not matter what the evil is we wish to escape. There is as good a shelter in him from what we deem a small danger, as from a great one, and we are as welcome to come to him for it. He is as much a refuge for an aching, or careworn, or fearful heart, as for a perishing, guilty soul. He is a hiding place from every wind, a covert from every tempest.

And one thing more—he is a *well-furnished* hiding place.

"I may fly to that rock or tower," a man in the desert may say, "and it may skreen me from the angry tempest; but suppose the tempest should continue, I may perish, and perish miserably from hunger or thirst, beneath its shelter." But no; there is provision and plentiful provision in this strong hold for all who enter it. We run into it to escape danger, but what do we find when we get within it? All that can refresh, delight, and satisfy a craving soul. We almost forget it is a hiding place; it becomes to us a pleasant dwelling place, the seat of our richest comforts, our happy home. Even were the storm to cease, we should not wish to leave it. We are better provided for, we are happier within our refuge, than we ever were out of it, or ever can be. "It hath pleased the Father," says the apostle speaking of Christ, "that in him should all fulness dwell." There is nothing wanting in him, which can make a sinner happy. And look at the verse before us. No sooner has the prophet spoken of him as a refuge, than he thinks of the refreshment and comfort that are to be enjoyed in him. This same Man who is to be a hiding place from the wind, is to be at the same time as "rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The psalmist too connects the ideas of provision and abundance with this refuge; "I cried unto thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living."

And now, brethren, let me ask, what think you of this hiding place, this secure, near, open, and richly furnished hiding place

for your helpless souls? What use have you made of it? Have you fled to it? Have you really entered it? Are you now within it? Some of you, blessed be God! are within it. To you this text says, "Rejoice in it. Let the inhabitants of this rock sing." See how dear you must be to Jehovah, for him to have provided such a refuge for you. "Noah," we read, "found grace in the eyes of the Lord," and how did the Lord manifest the grace and favour he bore him? He prepared an ark to save him, when all the world besides was about to be destroyed. And what an ark has he prepared for you! None but himself can tell the full cost of it; but when you hear that a Man is to be your hiding place, that your refuge has been built up by the incarnation and abasement of God's everlasting Son, you have heard enough to make you feel that you must be dearer to that God, than words can tell. You have heard enough to shew you also that none who are in Christ, can perish; that it is impossible for you to perish, so long as you are hid in him. Storms you may expect, storms you ought to expect; they will blow around you and blow upon you whether you look for them or not; this text seems to take it for granted that you will encounter them; but let them blow. They may shake, they may distress you; you may long with your whole soul to get away from their noise and havoc; but they cannot really injure, they cannot destroy you. You are hid in Christ, and the tempest that overwhelms you, must first overthrow him. The Rock of ages must be shivered, before those who are in it can be harmed. Not only must eternal love and eternal faithfulness give way, infinite power and everlasting strength must be overcome, before any thing in time or in eternity can ruin you.

But there are those here, who are out of this hiding place. Many of you know well enough that you have never entered it. You have heard of it, but you have never seen your need of it, or if you have seen your need of it, you have not cared about it, and have soon forgotten it. You are living out of Christ and without Christ in the world. Need I remind you again what the world is? Your own past experience, perhaps your own present experience, can tell you. It is a stormy world; there are winds and tempests in it, and you have felt them. They have at times well nigh overwhelmed you; they have cut some of you through and through. The beloved hiding places to which you used to go for comfort in these storms, are some of

them levelled with the ground, and all of them, one after another, will soon fall. And what at last will you do? You may be left to weather the last and worst storms of life alone. You must surely encounter unfriended, if not alone, the storm that will lay waste the world. O brethren, have mercy on yourselves. A refuge is near you, an open and a safe one. There is something in Christ that can bring you strength and comfort in all you now endure or fear; there is enough in him to save your souls alive. He invites you to come to him, that you may partake of all that is within him, that he may make you now and for ever safe, peaceful, and happy men. You are as welcome to enter this hiding place, as you were this morning to enter this church. There is nothing to keep you out of it, except it be your own unwillingness to go in. But enter it you must, or destruction will overtake you. It is not hearing of it, or looking at it, or admiring it, that can save you; you must get within it. In other words, you must flee to Christ as a Saviour for your own guilty souls. With a lively faith in his willingness and power to save you, you must commit your souls to him to be saved. Think of a man in a wide desert discovering a fearful storm rising, and flying to the only shelter he can see for safety, and when he gets up to it, finding an open door, and joyfully, though perhaps fearfully, venturing in—there is a picture of a sinner who has really come to Christ for salvation. And think of another man in the same desert. He is told of the coming storm, and he professes to believe that it is coming, but he is amusing himself with his fellow-travellers, or he is picking up the pebbles at his feet, and you cannot move him; you cannot get him even to look at the refuge you tell him of; or if he does look at it and you even prevail on him to move towards it, he stops, sits down in the way, and talks about it, and says, “I am resolved to enter it by and by”—there is a picture of thousands who hear of Christ and his salvation, and sink down in the grave without an interest in them. They perish within sight of a refuge; almost saved, but altogether lost. Beloved brethren, which of these two pictures describes you?

SERMON V.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

CHRIST'S HUMAN BODY THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

ST. JOHN II. 21.—“He spake of the temple of his body.”

WHEN our Lord conversed with the Jews, he spoke to them generally in the very plainest terms. Suppressing with a wonderful self-command his own lofty thoughts and deep emotions, he accommodated himself to the level of their ideas, speaking to their minds rather than from his own. But not so in the case before us.

He had just performed a signal miracle. Armed only with a scourge of cords, he had driven out of the temple at Jerusalem a throng of men who were profaning it; and instead of flying immediately from the dangers this act of holy zeal might bring on him, there he stands, in the calmness of conscious majesty, untouched on the very spot where he had wrought it. Now what said the Jews to this? “Truly this man is the Son of God?” No; with a strange mixture of folly and perverseness, they ask of him a miracle; “What sign shewest thou unto us?” just as though the display of power, which but a minute before had awed and confounded them, were not miracle enough. As might have been expected, our Lord refuses their demand, and he almost mocks them as he refuses it. He gives them an answer which not one of them could understand; “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” And thus he acts still with every caviller. “The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way;” he will stoop down to be an instructor of the most ignorant, a teacher of babes: but as for the proud and contentious, he leaves them in darkness; he throws a veil over his own blessed word when they open it, so that though they study it for years, and study it too with all the light which

learning and intellect can throw on it, they know nothing about it, nothing to any spiritual or useful purpose. It is to them at last just what they found it at first, a book of riddles.

But turn again to these Jews. No sooner did they hear Christ mention a temple, than they thought naturally enough that he meant the temple in which they were standing; but they were wrong. His words came for once out of the depths of his own mind, and consequently had a far deeper meaning in them than the people imagined. "He spake," says the text, "of the temple of his body;" not of that splendid structure which had crowned for so many ages the hill of Zion, but of that lowly tenement which had been seen for the first time a few years before amid the huts of Bethlehem.

You see then, brethren, the subject we have for our consideration. It is the human body of Christ viewed as the temple of the living God. And in looking at it in this light, we must keep in mind the Jewish temple. It is clear that in using the language before us, the Lord Jesus had it in his mind; and it is clear also that he must have seen some resemblance between it and himself. He would not otherwise have so promptly and naturally made use of it to signify himself.

We may trace this resemblance in three particulars. It represents our Lord's human nature as, first, a dwelling place for God to inhabit; then, as a form wherein to manifest or reveal himself; and then, as a monument to his praise.

I. Christ's human nature is *the dwelling place of God*.

We know that as soon as the first temple at Jerusalem was built, God entered into it. "The glory of the Lord," we read, "filled the house of the Lord." This splendid manifestation quickly passed away, but the Lord did not depart. He promised Solomon that he never would depart from that place. "I have surely built thee an house to dwell in," said the king to him, "a settled place for thee to abide in for ever." "I have hallowed this house which thou hast built," answered God, "to put my name there for ever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." And he fulfilled his promise. For several hundred years after, in fact to the very moment when the building was destroyed, a shining cloud is said to have been constantly abiding over the mercy-seat within that temple, and this the people were taught to regard as a symbol of Jehovah him-

self. The second temple indeed was without this or any other supernatural token of God's presence, but still God was there. He dwelt unseen within it, meeting his Israel there age after age and blessing them. And this fact was in our Lord's mind at this moment, for in one of the preceding verses, he calls the temple "his Father's house," and grounds the indignation he had just exhibited against those who profaned it, on this very circumstance.

And now turn to Bethlehem. But where shall we find there a habitation for God? We see there no glittering dome or high raised pinnacles, no crowding worshippers or smoking incense; we hear there no loud hallelujah or echoing psalm; but yet there, amid those lowly cottages and sheds, stands the house of the living God. True, we perceive in it at first no grandeur, no form or comeliness; the soul of the meanest angel seems to dwell in a fairer lodging place; but never before was any building raised, never before was any thing whatsoever created, for so high a purpose. We greatly mistake if we regard the human body of Christ as formed mainly to be a dwelling for the human soul of Christ. The everlasting Jehovah prepared it for himself; and as soon as it came into existence, he became its inhabitant. He entered it as really as he entered the Jewish temple; he dwelt in it at Bethlehem and Nazareth; he dwells in it now in the lofty heavens, and will dwell in it for ever, and this in a peculiar manner, as he has never dwelt any where else. He dwells indeed in his church; nay, every soul which he has redeemed, he calls his temple and his dwelling place; but why? Because he is continually acting on that soul by his Holy Spirit; because there is continually flowing into it, in some way which we understand not, an influence or emanation from himself. But when he speaks of dwelling in the Man Christ Jesus, he means much more than this. There is more in this case than an influence imparted or an operation going on; there is an actual passing of the Godhead into that frame of dust, a taking of the human nature into union with the divine, and a union so close and entire, that wherever that human frame is, there is God. "Two whole and perfect natures," says our church, "that is to say, the Godhead and the manhood, were joined together in one person never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man." The two cannot be separated. We may distinguish them; we must often distinguish them; the sense of scripture requires us to do

so ; but we cannot sever them. That Son of Man is the everlasting Jehovah ; and the everlasting Jehovah is that Son of Man.

Is this mysterious to you, brethren ? It was mysterious to Paul with his mighty intellect. "Great," he says, "is the mystery of godliness." It is mysterious to angels. We cannot explain it ; but what then ? We can refer you to scripture after scripture which calls on you most plainly to believe it. "God was in Christ," says St. Paul. "The Word," says St. John, the same Word that was in the beginning with God and was God, "was made flesh ;" was so closely connected with flesh, that it became, as it were, identified with it. And there is a passage in the epistle to the Colossians, wherein the Holy Spirit states this truth yet more strongly. Speaking of Christ, "In him," he says, "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." He does not say now that God is in Christ, or that God dwells in Christ, for that, some might assert, is by an influence, as he dwells in us ; but he says, "the Godhead" is in him. And he does not stop there ; it might then have been contended that the Godhead is partially in him ; he says, "the fulness" of the Godhead ; and more—"all" its fulness ; and lest an objector should answer, "Yes, by a figure, in some metaphorical sense," he says, "No, not by a figure ; in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," really, substantially, entirely, just as your soul and mine dwells in our bodies. God dwells in his church by what we call his grace, by an influence, by communications from himself ; he dwells in the Man Christ Jesus by a personal union. God dwells in his church as the light of day dwells in our houses ; he dwells in Christ as the same light dwells in the sun. He dwells among his people as the ocean dwells in the rivers whither the swelling tide carries it ; he dwells in the incarnate Jesus as that ocean dwells in its bed.

Am I pressing this point too long, brethren ? Do I seem to any of you to be attaching to it too much importance ? I see not how I or any one can overstate its importance. It is "the pillar of the truth," the column which supports the whole fabric of Christianity ; it is more—it is "the ground" or foundation of it. You might as well tell me that the foundation of the building in which you are now seated, could be represented as of too much importance to this building itself. Take it away, the whole structure falls. Instead of this house of God where God

has so often met us and blessed us, there remains only a heap of ruins. And take this great truth out of Christianity, remove from it the real, personal indwelling of the Godhead in the body of Christ, to what have you reduced Christianity? What is it become? Where is now its beauty, and glory, and value? Nay, where is its meaning and sense? We can discover scarcely a trace of any one of them. You have removed the rock on which the whole stood, and of what you have left, we can make nothing. It is a glorious temple overthrown. It is a splendid but most mournful ruin. Some truths perhaps we may reject, yes, some scriptural truths, and we shall suffer for the rejection of them; but yet in the main we may be sound in the faith and be safe. This is like closing up one window of a building; the light will still come in through others, and be sufficient for all the ordinary purposes of life. But to reject this truth is not to close one entrance of light; it is not to shut up one window of a room or all its windows; it is to tear the glorious sun from the heavens, and then to talk about getting from those heavens light and warmth. A Christianity without God in Christ may be a beautiful code of morals, but as for warming the heart, or purifying the affections, or comforting the troubled spirit, or saving the immortal soul, it can no more do either than the philosophy of Plato or the morals of Confucius. But to go on—

II. God, we are aware, is not an object of sense. He is in himself, as our church says, “without body or parts.” He may consequently be in a place and not be known to be there. He is at this moment in this house of prayer, but none of us can see him here. He is in our own houses, but we seldom discover him in them. We may advance therefore a step farther, and observe that the human body of Christ is *a manifestation of God*. It is something which makes an unseen God visible to us, and an unknown God known. It shews him forth, and brings us acquainted with him.

And herein also the resemblance between him and both the Jewish temples holds good, especially the first. When God entered that, he entered it, you remember, not spiritually only, but visibly: he made a bright cloud the symbol of his presence in it. This the people beheld. It was impossible they should not behold it. So dazzling was its splendour, that “the priests could not stand to minister in the temple because of the cloud.”

To impress the reality of his presence on their minds, he made his presence for a time overpowering. The flame too which continued to burn in the holy place, was a visible representation of him. Such he described it. "I will appear," he says, "in the cloud upon the mercy-seat." Such his servants regarded it. They not only spoke of him as dwelling between the cherubim, we find one of them alluding to him as discovering himself there; "O thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth." Besides this, much of the furniture and all the services of the temple testified of Jehovah. The memorials which were laid up there of his power and goodness, the sacrifices offered there, the rites and ordinances which were continually going on there, all proclaimed his character. They revealed to such of his Israel as had any spiritual discernment, his perfections, as well as his existence and presence. And God too, it seems, made his temple the scene of some very peculiar manifestations of himself. There Isaiah beheld him in that splendid vision which he describes in the beginning of his prophecy. There Zacharias, the father of John, held converse with his angel. There, or at least in the tabernacle which corresponded with this temple, David speaks of having seen, as he could see no where else, his power and his glory.

And now turn to Christ. To understand the application of all this to him, we must bear in mind two facts.

1. Though we ourselves are spiritual beings, *we can form no conception of any being that is purely spiritual*. I do not mean that we can form no correct or adequate idea of such a being, but no idea at all; we cannot place him before our minds. And this incapacity of ours does not arise from our not having attained a certain degree of piety or knowledge, but from the present constitution of our nature. It is an unavoidable, or what is called a natural, physical incapacity. We are as unable to conceive of spirit as a blind man is to see. Now God is a spirit. In his divine nature, he is a spirit only, a spirit and nothing else. It will follow then that unless something is done to help us, we can never have any right idea of God whatsoever. We may form some conceptions of his attributes; we may know him to be powerful, and great, and good; but as for God himself, he can have no place in our minds.

We are only half conscious of this truth, brethren. We hear so much of the divine Being as a spirit, the term is so familiar

to us, that we think we understand it; but if we look into ourselves for an instant, and ask ourselves what we mean by a spirit, we feel at once that we do not know what we mean. We are obliged to place God before us as a person, a material thing, before we can conceive at all of him. And now behold his wonderful compassion. He meets this weakness of our nature. We cannot get into that spiritual world which he inhabits; he comes therefore within our range, into the world of matter. He places himself before us in a nature in which we can in some measure see and comprehend him. "Strain your minds no more," he says, "to conceive of me as I am. Without laying my spiritual nature aside, I will become as much an object of sense as any one of yourselves." He stoops down and embodies himself in the human nature of Christ, and then says to an astonished universe, "Behold your God." And this is a part of what St. Paul means when he says, "God was manifest in the flesh;" and a part too of what our Lord meant when he said to one of his disciples who had asked him to shew them the Father, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

2. We must bear in mind another truth—*we can form no adequate idea of the character of any being, unless we see him in action, or are made acquainted with his actions.* The mere sight of him will not do much to bring us acquainted with him. Before we can get any extensive or certain knowledge of him, we must hear him speak, we must see him act, we must mark his conduct.

Now had the great God merely embodied himself in a human frame, and then just shewn himself to the earth and disappeared, we should not have been advanced materially in our knowledge of him. We should have had something to place in our minds as an image or symbol of him, just as the Jews had who beheld the pillar and cloud in the wilderness, but that would have been all; we should have known little more of his attributes and perfections, than we knew before. Hence he was not only made flesh, but "dwelt among us." He not only took on him our nature, but while in that nature, he spoke and acted; and in so doing, made such a revelation of himself to his creatures as had never been made before, and, we might say, never could be made by any other means. By the truths Christ taught, by the powers he exercised, by the dispositions he manifested, by his humble, self-denying, patient, holy life, and above all, far above

all, by his amazing sufferings and death, he has shewed us God ; he has unfolded to us the divine character ; he has manifested more of the unseen Jehovah, than either we or any angel in heaven can ever take in. Something was known of God before. Thousands of created worlds had proclaimed one to another his boundless power. The heavens had declared from age to age his glory, and the firmament had shewed forth his handywork. His law too had asserted his authority and holiness, and his providence had borne witness to his justice, his goodness and truth. But what was all this ? The scriptures speak of it as nothing, when compared with the person, and work, and cross, of Christ. It left the whole world in darkness, says Paul ; God rose on it in Christ as a brilliant sun. " We preach not ourselves," he says, " but Christ Jesus the Lord ;" and why him ? He tells us ; " For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." St. John employs the same figure. " He was the light of men," he says, " a light that shineth in darkness."

III. And this brings us to a third point of resemblance between Christ and the temple—his human nature is *a monument to God's praise*.

We wonder not that lofty structures were raised to the gods of the heathen, and that the heathen thought they honoured their gods by raising them. They really did honour them. Their gods were men like themselves and sometimes less than men, but the sun never rose on more gigantic efforts of human power than their temples, or prouder achievements of human skill. The mere ruins of them force admiration and wonder too from every beholder. But as for building a temple to the living Jehovah's glory, the thought of it seems at first confounding. Majestic we may make it ; it may surpass in grandeur all that was ever seen in Egypt, or Greece, or Rome ; it may appear for a moment worthy of its object ; but how long could such an illusion last ? One right thought of God dispels it all. We think of him who has heaven for his throne and the earth for his footstool, we get a sight or something like a sight of the divine majesty and vastness, and where is the glory of man's architecture now ? It is gone. We can no longer think of it. We feel that we can no more raise a building to do God

honour or shew forth his greatness, than we can paint a picture bright as the sun. But yet God did allow a temple to be built to him at Jerusalem, and that temple did shew forth his praise. It was a public acknowledgment of him by those who acknowledged no other god; it was an indication of the high conceptions which the builders of that temple and the people of that city had formed of him. The stranger, as he gazed on its laboured magnificence, must have felt that the Lord God of Israel was held in honour there, and the Jew must have been reminded that the God of his fathers was worthy of all honour and praise.

Now turn again to the Lord Jesus. Is there a Christian man here who needs to be told that his human nature glorifies God while it reveals him? God raised it up and dedicated it to his glory, and he who looks on it aright, feels that it answers in a most wonderful manner its intended purpose; it shews forth and augments unutterably Jehovah's praise. It must do so. God is a glorious God; his character is a glorious character. Whatsoever then makes God and his character known, must at the same time make known his glory. His glory and himself must be revealed together. Shew a man the mid-day sun without shewing him its brightness; but you cannot open the eyes of his mind to behold God as he is manifested in Christ, without shewing him a splendour there, that will astonish and delight him. Hence in the passage to which you have just been referred, the light seen in the face of Christ is called "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." "The Word was made flesh," says St. John, "and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." He is "the brightness of the Father's glory," says St. Paul; and why? His next words tell us—he is "the express image of his person." And this too was the burden of that song which astonished the shepherds at Bethlehem. The multitude of the heavenly host sang there, "Glory to God in the highest," because never before had they seen the divine glory as they saw it then; no, not amid the blaze of heaven's splendours, as in that stable and in that new-born infant's frame. And could we look into heaven now, we should see that same frame the wonder of that lofty world. It is "the glory of God" even there. "The Lamb is the light" of heaven,

and "the nations of them which are saved," are said to walk there in the light which that Lamb gives.

We discover then in this scripture one great object of our Lord's incarnation. God did not take on him our nature solely that in our nature he might suffer and die, and so make a propitiation for our sins; he came among men that men might see and know him. His incarnation was a manifestation of himself. He entered the temple of his body, that in that temple he might be discovered and understood, worshipped, loved, and adored. You must not therefore treat what you have heard to-day, as so much speculation; as something which may be true, but yet as something you need not trouble yourselves to understand. It is not speculation. It is a matter of fact, and a matter too of great practical moment. It is life eternal to know God. There is no life in eternity for you and me without a knowledge of him. And how are we to know him? It must be in his own way or not at all; and that way is in the temple of his body, the person of his Son. If we learn nothing of him there, we might as well not know that he is there; we might as well say with the unbeliever that Jesus is a mere man. Nay, we act in this respect more irrationally than the unbeliever. He looks on our blessed Lord as man only, and as man he treats him. We believe, or profess to believe, that he is God and God manifested to us, and yet we never try to see God in him, never aim to discover in him the traces of his Father's glory. But this is not Christianity, brethren. This is not true Christian faith. That is in every case a practical thing. It gives every thing we believe an influence on our conduct; it carries it out into practice. If we believe that God is in Christ, abiding and dwelling in him, then we assuredly go a step farther—we see something of God in Christ and try to see more. What we see delights us. It elevates, and expands, and purifies, while it delights us. It makes us long to be in heaven, where we shall see this manifestation of glory in all its brightness; and it prepares us for thus seeing it; it transforms us. And nothing but this can transform us. Nothing can make vile man resemble God, but a contemplation of God as God is. And if we are not like God, not partakers of the divine nature, we know whom we resemble, of whose nature we partake, and in whose kingdom we shall soon be. It follows then that more hangs on this

matter than appears on the surface. The truths you have now been listening to, aim at your hearts, as well as your understandings. They aim at your souls; they are intended to save your souls from everlasting destruction. To know them and to yield to their power is to be in the way to heaven; to pass them by and neglect them, or to admire for a moment and then forget them, is what? Judge for yourselves; "If our gospel be hid," says Paul, "it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

SERMON VI.

THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

CHRIST A SAVIOUR.

ST. MATTHEW I. 21.—"Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

AN angel's words, brethren, addressed to Joseph, the reputed father of our Lord. They call our attention, first, to the work our Lord came into this sinful world to accomplish, and then to the name he is to bear here in consequence of it.

I. *The work he is to accomplish*, is a most great, glorious, and blessed one; "He shall save his people from their sins."

"He shall *save*." Another scripture says, he shall destroy; "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." There he is a Destroyer, here a Saviour. The two characters however are quite consistent. He demolishes the works of Satan, because these works stand in his way as a Saviour. Our salvation requires their destruction. They are like the walls which a triumphant deliverer beats down, when he comes to the prisoner's rescue.

“He shall save *his people*.” He is elsewhere spoken of as “the Saviour of all men;” as sent by his Father to be “the Saviour of the world.” But here again is no contradiction. We call a man the physician of this or that army, and why? Because he visits and heals all in that army? No; but because he is appointed to heal them; his commission extends to them all; any of them may come to him if they will, and have the benefit of his aid. So is Christ called the world’s Saviour, because his commission as a Saviour embraces the world; he stands in the relation of a Saviour to all the fallen children of Adam; as many as will may turn to him, and find him authorized, prepared, and waiting, to save them. But those whom he actually saves, are his people, his own willing and obedient people, the people who come to him to be saved. They are the sick in the army, who believe in this great Physician’s skill, and find their way to him, and put their case in his hands.

And just observe how eager the Father appears to be to acknowledge our Lord’s property in this people. They are called here, not God’s people, but Christ’s. And yet they are the very same who are so often called elsewhere the people of God. They were God’s, but he makes them over to his incarnate Son, commits them into his hands, gives him an interest in them and a title to them. “Thine they were,” Christ says, “and thou gavest them me.” And the Father does this with a joyful haste. Before his Son is born, they are transferred to him. While he is only preparing to pay the price for them, his name is put on them, they are said to be his. He shall save, says the angel, not his Father’s people, but his own.

And again—“He shall save his people *from their sins*.” The Jews expected their Messiah to be a Saviour, but then, like Moses, or Gideon, or Cyrus, he was to be a Saviour, they thought, from their outward enemies; a triumphant hero; one who should deliver them gloriously from their Roman masters, and establish again in all its extent and splendour the empire of their early kings. Even the godly part of them were not free from this notion. But this angel comes and gives a death-blow at once to these fond expectations. “Your Messiah shall be a Saviour,” he says, “but not such a Saviour as you anticipate. He shall deliver you, not from your national, but from your spiritual tyrants; not from the Romans, but from far worse enemies. He shall save his people from their sins.”

He shall save them from *the penalty* of their sins.

"Blessed," says the psalmist, "is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered;" and the first thing which Christ does for us when he saves us, is to make this blessedness ours. The law of God, like human laws, has threatenings connected with it. It denounces a punishment against all transgressions of it. Every sin we commit therefore, brings a penalty upon us. Hence we are said to "heap up" or accumulate wrath to ourselves against the day of wrath. But Christ, we are told, "bare our sins in his own body on the tree;" that is, he took the guilt and punishment of them on himself there; he paid there once for all a sufficient penalty for them all; so that the moment we come to him as a Saviour, and really believe on him as a Saviour, all our heaped up punishment is done away with; we become interested in the great propitiation he has offered; and there is no longer any wrath awaiting us; nay, there is henceforth no sin imputed to us; our iniquities are forgiven, and our sins are covered.

And he saves too from *the dominion and practice* of sin—another happy deliverance.

The dominion of sin is the sovereignty and power which, by nature, sin exercises over us all. Sin, brethren, is not a thing to be taken up and laid down at pleasure. It is not something which we can admit into our hearts, and foster for a little while there, and then turn out again. Where it enters, it abides, we cannot turn it out; and where it abides, it reigns. It governs a man as an abject slave is governed by his master. Now Christ, by communicating his Spirit to them, undermines, weakens, and, in the end, destroys in his people this lordly dominion of sin. Imparting to them the divine nature, he imparts to them much which is altogether at variance with sin—a measure of the divine loftiness, constraining them to look down on sin as a degrading thing; and a measure of the divine holiness, begetting in them a hatred and loathing of sin; and a measure of the divine strength also, enabling them effectually to resist and overcome it. And consequent upon this giving way of the power of sin within them, there is a giving way in their lives of all their former evil habits and practices.

And really, brethren, if Christ did nothing else for us than save us thus from our sins, he would still be a blessed Saviour to us. Think of the misery that sin can inflict and does inflict

here in this world before we come upon the full harvest of it in another—misery upon ourselves, misery upon others; misery in our hearts and consciences, misery upon misery in our families, misery round about among our friends and neighbours. Take out of the world the wretchedness which the sin of man inflicts on himself and his fellow-man, I do not say, it would be a happy world, but more than half its bitterest sufferings would be gone. See what God thinks of a salvation like this. In one passage of his word, he declares it to be the great end for which he raised up for us a Saviour, the one great blessing he sent Christ into our world to bring us. “Unto you first,” says Peter to the Jews, “God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you,” and how to bless you? “in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” A blessedness indeed! If you have experienced it, you know the worth of it. You account it one of the greatest blessings of your life, if not the greatest of all, that a breach has been made between you and your once loved sins; that you are turned away, saved, from them. Other deliverances make you thankful, but this often fills your heart to overflowing with thankfulness and, at the same time, with wonder and joy.

And then Christ saves us too in the end from *the very existence* of sin. I say “in the end,” for we get not this part of his salvation here. It is one thing to have sin mastered and subdued within us, and another thing to have it exterminated. Those of us in whom it is the most subdued, know well enough that it still dwells in them, and dwells in them too, not as a dead, inactive, powerless thing, but as a living, struggling, and vigorous thing. It is thrown down, but were the hand that has thrown it down and keeps it down, taken off, it would be up again in a moment, and we should be tyrannized over again by it just as before. But there is an appointed time to it. When we wake up in eternity, we shall find, if we are the people of Christ, that “the body of sin” in us is destroyed, and entirely destroyed. It will be a strange feeling, brethren, but a very joyful one, to look for this long hated thing within us, and to find it gone; to put ourselves in our old attitude of watchfulness and conflict, and to discover that there is no enemy left for us to fight with or watch against; to cast away self-denial, and to know that we may cast it away; to live without sin, and to do this easily, without even striving or aiming to do it, as

easily as we now move, or speak, or breathe. This, we may say again, will indeed be blessedness. Even in heaven, that world of joy, it will be felt to be blessedness. There is not only a heaven around us, we shall say, there is a heaven within us. Sin is gone. We thought ourselves happy when it was dethroned in us; we feel ourselves happy indeed now it is destroyed.

And from one thing more the Lord Jesus saves his people—from *the painful remembrance* of their sins.

This too is a future, heavenly deliverance. Here on earth they who have the strongest assurance of pardoning mercy, have at times much bitterness of soul at the remembrance of their transgressions. The Lord, they say, may have blotted them out from his memory, but we cannot blot them out from ours. Tell them of a perfect salvation, of perfect happiness, and you must tell them, at the same time, of a change here. And this change awaits them. Though beyond doubt we shall remember our sins in heaven, it will not be with a bitter, pungent remembrance. The memory of them will be that of ills we have escaped, rather than of evils we have done. It will not tear our minds with anguish; it will warm them with thankfulness. It will sweeten to us the safety and holiness of heaven; and how it will endear to us the Lord who has saved us, we must be in heaven, and look on that Lord there, and think of our sins as we look on him, before we can tell.

And this completes the salvation of which the text speaks. The Lord Jesus saves his people from the penalty of their sins—that delivers them from hell; from the dominion and practice of their sins—that prepares them for heaven; from the very existence of sin within them—that qualifies them for the full enjoyment of heaven; from the painful remembrance of their sins—that prevents their enjoyment of heaven from being interrupted or marred.

II. We have to look at *the name our Lord is to bear in consequence of this work of salvation*; “Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.”

This word in the original Hebrew, as you are all aware, means a Saviour. It was a name well known and in common use among the Jews. Originally it was “Oshea,” signifying simply a Saviour; but if you will turn to the thirteenth chapter of the

Book of Numbers, you will see that Moses, in the case of Oshea, the son of Nun, prefixed to it the first syllable of the great Jehovah's name, making it "Jehoshua," a divine Saviour. This was soon contracted to "Joshua," and passing through the Greek language to us, it became "Jesus."

The circumstance however to be chiefly noticed here, is the divine appointment of this name. It was given our Lord, not by his parents or disciples, but by God himself, and this before he was born, and twice over before he was born—first, as St. Luke tells us, in a message to Mary his mother, and afterwards, as we are told here by St. Matthew, in another message to Joseph. And it is further remarkable that both these evangelists mention the subsequent affixing of this name to him—St. Matthew at the end of this chapter, and St. Luke in the second chapter of his gospel. "His name," he says, "was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived."

Now what are we to learn from this?

1. It discovers to us *the character in which God himself most delights to regard his Son.*

Angels, at God's bidding, come down from heaven to give him this name, to proclaim him a Saviour; a clear proof that the Lord himself is viewing him as a Saviour, and something like a proof that he deems this his most honourable character, that his own mind dwells on him the most in this character, and with the highest pleasure. The delight with which the eternal Father regards his Son, is indeed a lofty thing for creatures such as we are to speak of or think of, but the Father himself invites us to think of it; he himself speaks to us of it. He calls him in his word his "well beloved Son," his "dear Son," his "elect in whom his soul delighteth." And this delight in him, he gives us reason to believe, springs, in a great measure, from the character his Son sustains towards us, and the work he is so triumphantly carrying on among us, the work of our salvation. It is a salvation which glorifies every perfection of the Godhead, and the Lord delights in the manifestation of his own perfections and glory. It is a full outpouring of the goodness, a free indulgence of the abounding love, of Jehovah, and nothing so pleasurable to Jehovah as the indulgence of his love. It is also a making, for the first time, of the unholy pure, the saving of a multitude of polluted beings from their sins, and a holy God delights in purity. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, a Saviour,

for he is dear to me as my people's Saviour, yea, dearer than as the partner of my throne."

But doubtless the Lord had us in his mind when he ordained this name for his Son.

2. It shews us that *he would have us regard him chiefly as a Saviour.*

In the days of old, he had often condescended to give names to men, and these names, though they might sometimes be expressive of his own feelings towards them, were more frequently descriptive of some peculiarity in their character, or of some particular work or station for which they were designed. So when he sends his dear Son into the world, he gives him a name that declares to the world what he is and why he sends him. He comes into the world with a name upon him, that proclaims him openly the world's Saviour. This is more than erecting a refuge for us in the storm, and setting wide open the door of it; it is writing the word "Refuge" conspicuously upon it, so that every passer by may see that it is a refuge. "I have given you my Son," says God, "and what I most want of you, wretched sinners, is, not that you should fall down and adore him as my Son, but that you should welcome him as perishing men would welcome a deliverer. I have sent him from heaven to earth to save you, and you shall call him a Saviour, that you may never forget wherefore he is come."

3. And the Lord may have affixed this name to Christ *to endear him the more to our hearts.*

If he himself loves him, he must desire us to love him; and what so likely to kindle our love for him, as the placing of him continually before us in the character of a Saviour? We love him, and ought to love him for his own glorious excellencies, but it was not these, which first taught us to love him; it was his own great love for us manifested in our salvation. He came into this miserable world to save us; vile as we are, "he loved us and gave himself for us;" while we were yet his enemies, he died for us; and when we were so polluted that nothing else could cleanse us, he "washed us from our sins in his own blood;"—it was the belief of this, which first touched our hard hearts with love for our Lord, and it is the remembrance of this, which revives that love now when it is languishing, and often lays us down at his feet, weeping with love for him, and feeling that we can never love him enough. "You shall have him

therefore," says God, "ever before you in this soul-affecting, this endearing character. I will call him Jesus, and you shall call him Jesus, that the very sound of his name may remind you of what he has done for you, and of his claims on your affections and hearts."

And has not this name, brethren, often wrought thus within you? Have you not felt it to be an endearing name? You may have made but little use of it perhaps among your fellow-men, for it has seemed to you almost too sacred for common use; but when alone, has it not frequently been your comfort and joy? Have you not delighted to use it in your secret converse with your Lord? "Thy name is as ointment poured forth," says the church to him; "therefore do the virgins love thee;" and you can understand the language. Let a rich eastern ointment be opened and poured out, it will fill a whole house with its odour; there is a fragrance diffused around, that refreshes and delights. So has the name of the blessed Jesus been to you. It has delighted your inmost souls; and because of its power to delight, it has made that Jesus himself seem more dear to you and precious.

And now with one practical remark we may conclude—*We see here beyond all dispute the real nature and design of Christ's religion.* What is it? Look at this text, and you will say, it is a deliverance from sin. It is not something that is to instruct, or improve, or comfort men simply; it is something that is to save them; and it is not to save them from this or that evil or sorrow—it strikes at the root of all evils and sorrows; it is to save them from their sins. This is the one great object and end of it. Then, beloved brethren, let us not trifle. Do not let us act as children, professing to value Christianity and really valuing perhaps some things connected with it, and yet never thinking of the great end it is to answer, caring nothing about its very soul and substance. Drowning men do not content themselves with admiring the form of the life-boat that is sent out to save them. They remember why it is sent, and their great, their only concern is to lay hold of it and get into it, that they may be saved. Are we then saved from our sins by Christ? or if not so, are we anxiously seeking to be saved from our sins by him? That is the great question.

Many men look to Christ for salvation, but it is not the salvation

of which this text speaks. It is a distant thing—a salvation when they die from some wretched place they have in their minds. But the salvation which Christ gives to his people, is a present thing; we have not to wait for it till we die. It is a change of state now before God, a passing from a condemned into a pardoned state. And it is a change of character, a change of heart and life; the giving way of that which is earthly, and sensual, and—I must add another word, for the scripture adds it—of that which is devilish within us, and the implantation within us of much that is spiritual, and heavenly, and divine. It is a salvation worthy of a holy God to give, and most worthy of a rational and immortal creature to receive. It glorifies the great Giver of it; it dignifies, while it delivers and purifies, the happy receivers of it. If you are looking for any thing short of this, brethren, you will not find it in the holy Jesus or in his holy gospel. You must go to what St. Paul calls “another gospel” for it, to a spurious Christianity. But if you are looking for this in Christ, this holy salvation, you will find it.

Take the comfort from this name of his, it was given him to afford you. He did not reject it when it was given him. He did not say when they called him Jesus, “Call me by some loftier title.” No, he took this name on him as though he had chosen it for himself. He bore it about with him as long as he lived on earth, and when he died, he died with it above him on his cross. And he bears it now. Think of him on his throne. He has indeed another name written on him there, “King of kings, and Lord of lords;” but when he speaks to us, he says, “Call me not that. I am Jesus still, Jesus your Saviour. I love that name, for I love you. I will never abandon it. My angels adore me here as Jesus your Saviour; and would you do me honour, would you put fresh joy into my joyful heart? Then look up to me as Jesus your Saviour. Come, ye sinful and vile, ye polluted and guilty, come and plead at my feet the name that is put on me. I will not disown it. I will joyfully act up to it. For my name’s sake I will pardon your iniquities, though your iniquities be great. I will save you from your sins, though your sins be too many to be numbered and too dark to be named.”

SERMON VII.

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN THE YEAR.

THE MORROW UNKNOWN.

ST. JAMES IV. 14.—“Ye know not what shall be on the morrow.”

THIS is nothing more than the statement of an undeniable and well known fact. No one disputes it; not a man on the face of the earth is ignorant of it. Why then, we may ask, is it introduced into a revelation from heaven? Doubtless to stamp it with importance, to draw our attention to it, to lead us to turn it to some good account.

Its suitableness as a subject of meditation for us at this time, is at once clear. A new year is now opening on us, and we are all ready to ask, What will it be to us? But this text checks us. “You do not know,” it says, “and you cannot know what it will be; and your wisdom lies in not aiming to know. Begin this year like men who believe and feel that they know not what shall be on the morrow.”

That this simple truth may be made useful to us, let us notice, first, our ignorance of futurity; then, the probable reasons why we are kept in this ignorance; and then, the influence it ought to have on our minds.

I. *Our ignorance* is expressed by the apostle in strong terms. “We will go here and there,” say the people he is addressing, “and continue a year;” but he does not talk to them about the uncertainty of a year. He does not even say, “You cannot reckon on months or weeks.” “You know not,” he tells them, “what shall be on the morrow. You cannot answer for the events of a few short hours.” Solomon declares the same truth in precisely the same strong manner. “Boast not thyself of”—what? years to come? No—“of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” And this is not at all strain

ing the point. Our ignorance might be stated more forcibly still—the next hour is hidden from us; we know not what another moment may do.

But yet declarations like these must be understood with some limitations. We do know a little of the future. A few of its events are as much matters of certainty with us, as any transactions of the past or even of the present. For instance—I am as sure that I shall one day stand at God's judgment-seat, as I can be that I am now breathing God's air. I know that Jesus Christ is coming to judge my guilty soul, as certainly as I know that he once came to save it. But then how do I know these things? Simply because God has revealed them to me. Shut up my Bible, and I know nothing at all of them.

Again—without revelation we form some notions as to the future, and often correct notions. They do not come up to positive certainty, yet they approach very near it. I refer to the ideas we get of the future from our experience of the past. Thus, I am almost as certain that the sun will rise to-morrow, as I am that it rose to-day. If I am not quite sure that the summer will succeed the winter, a voice from heaven could add little to my expectation of it.

Now the apostle, in the text, does not dispute this or any part of it. All he means is, that as to the great mass of events about to take place in our world, we know nothing; that though we may be acquainted with here and there a solitary fact because God has revealed it to us, or be half acquainted with other facts because experience leads us to anticipate them, we have no organ of vision, that will penetrate the future; we are in the main completely ignorant of it; we cannot see a yard before us; we are as incapable of writing the history of to-morrow as we are the records of eternity.

If proofs were wanted of the fact, I might say, look back a few years for them. What numberless and startling proofs of it have we witnessed in our own short lives! Changes one after another have occurred in nations, in parishes, in families, around us, that never appeared the least likely to occur. We no more expected them, than we look for the rising of the sun at midnight.

And what says our own history? Is it the history our imaginations drew amid the scenes of childhood and opening youth? Are we the men we thought we should be, and are we in the

place and in the condition we looked for? Far otherwise. A gracious God has led us from our cradle to the present hour, led us with a love and tenderness which have amazed us and according to a fixed, determined plan, but it has been "by a way which we knew not, and in paths that we have not known."

How strange, for instance, and unforeseen have been the connections we have formed as we have passed along! The friends of our youth, those with whom we began life, and whom we expected to share our sorrows and comforts all through it—where are they? Out of our sight: for the greater part in their graves; the rest, with scarcely an exception, far away from us, and perhaps alienated. And who are those that supply their place, and are now the dearest to our hearts? Men who, a few years ago, were unknown to us; we had never, it may be, even heard their names.

And again—look at our situations in life—some of us are raised in society beyond our utmost expectations, enjoying an affluence and honour which at the outset of our career we never dreamed of; while others are plunged into troubles and distresses from which we seemed the farthest removed. Take the history of only a single parish through a single year; glance over the history of your neighbours since the last year began; think, some of you, of the condition of your own families a few short months ago and their condition now; and then resist, if you can, the force of this simple truth, "I know not what shall be on the morrow. So unlooked for, so strange, so confounding, are the things I have seen and experienced, that I can no more guess what I may see and experience next, than a babe."

And then to deepen this conviction of our ignorance, recollect how often, as these changes have been passing over us, we have mistaken their nature and bearing. We have hailed those things as blessings, which have proved our greatest sorrows, while we have shrunk from other things as evils, which have turned out our chief mercies. "All these things are against me," has been the language of our foolish hearts, and this not when snares have been spreading for us, and earthly temptations have been entrapping us, and mischief to us has begun, but when all the power, and love, and wisdom, of heaven have been put forth for our good.

And just as it has been, it will be. We may think not. We may conceive that the uncertainties of life are over with us;

that what we have already experienced has prepared us for every possible vicissitude ; that we have attained a sagacity and foresight which will discern every event of the future as it is coming on ; but this is a delusion. We are as ignorant as ever of what lies before us. Never surprised again ? Why, brethren, you may be surprised to-day more than you have ever been yet. Tidings more unexpected than any you have ever heard, may reach you before this sun is set, and turn you cold with wonder. There is a veil before the morrow, which no experience can pierce. We learn as we grow older to expect changes, but we never learn to foresee what these changes will be, nor when they will come.

And here the man of God stands on exactly the same level with the man of the world. God teaches him many things, but he never teaches him this.

Nor is the word of prophecy of much service to us in this matter. It announces things to come, but it envelopes most of them in so much darkness, it predicts them in language so symbolical and mysterious, that we know little of them till they take place. The event, and nothing but the event, explains the prediction.

II. And now let us turn to another point—*the probable reasons why we are kept in this state of ignorance.*

1. *It serves to remind us of the divine greatness ;* it proclaims to us the boundless superiority of the everlasting God.

The height to which infinite grace exalts a believer in Christ Jesus, surpasses our understanding. He is said to be made a “partaker of the divine nature,” to be “filled with all the fulness of God.” It is promised him that he shall awake up at last in his Redeemer’s likeness, enter with him into the same joy, and sit down with him on the same throne. Who can estimate or measure an elevation like this ? But let the eternal Jehovah lift up man as he will, he will ever leave him infinitely below himself ; and not only so, but, in one way or another, he will ever bring into clear and open view the wide space that intervenes between him and himself. And one mode whereby he does this, is the ignorance we are considering. Whatever he gives us, he reserves his foreknowledge to himself ; he imparts not an atom of it to any creature ; and in this way he forces on us and on all his wondering universe a sense of his greatness.

Hence he often adduces his foreknowledge as a proof of his Godhead ; as something characteristic of his divinity, and peculiar to it. "Produce your cause, bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen ; let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them ; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." "I am the Lord," he says again, "that is my name ; and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare ; before they spring forth, I tell you of them."

And well adapted, brethren, is this foreknowledge to set forth Jehovah's greatness, and to put into your heart and mine a consciousness of our littleness. Look at man—destined to live for ever ; from the instant he starts into being, claiming as his own every moment of an endless eternity ; as sure of it as he is of his present existence, and yet so ignorant of it, that he knows nothing of even the next hour, nay, he cannot see to the end of this ! And now look at God. "He knoweth the end from the beginning." He has every event of every moment ever before his mind. He is as familiar with the movements of everlasting ages, as with those of yesterday or to-day. Man speculating, and reasoning, and striving ; grappling with the future all his life long ; often tearing at the veil before him, as though he defied omnipotence to keep it there ; and yet after all, knowing nothing ;—God never striving at all, but penetrating the future at a glance, surveying eternity, in all its length and breadth, without a movement or an effort.

2. This ignorance is calculated also *to remind us of our subjection to God.*

We are all "under God's mighty hand ;" not within his reach merely, but actually within his grasp, so that we are controlled by him every moment, and are unable to move a step either backward or forward, to the right hand or the left, but as he permits us. And what in our natural condition do we know of this ? Nothing at all. There is a spirit of independence in our fallen nature, which not only spurns all heavenly control, but actually blinds our eyes to the existence of any such control. We wish to be free, and we imagine we are so. We accordingly lay our plans and set about our projects, exactly as

though we were our own masters, without any reference to God or any suspicion whatever of his interference with us. "To-day or to-morrow," we say, "we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain." We go, but what takes place? Events that we did not foresee, suddenly rise up and baffle us. They first hamper our schemes, and then demolish them. We find out that we have been calculating in the dark. We are forced to feel that we are not our own masters nor the authors of our own destinies, that there is a hand which overrules us and all that befalls us. We are reminded, in fact, of a forgotten God. Our ignorance of the future brings our best laid schemes to ruin; our ruined schemes tell us of our dependence on the world's great Master. The truth comes out—we "are under the mighty hand of God;" and though we may struggle under that hand, and spurn the control it exercises, we see that we cannot escape from it; we are constrained to feel its existence and yield to its power. And then perhaps at last we are brought to the spirit the apostle inculcates in the verse following the text. We begin to speculate and plan again. Again it is, "We will go here and there," but this is not all. We now bring God into our schemes. We lay them before him; we remember that their success depends entirely on him. It is still as before, "We will do this or that," but then comes in this one short saying more, "If the Lord will"—making all the difference between the independence of a rebel, and the subjection that becomes a creature.

And this is the design of the gospel, brethren. The two things I have now mentioned, are precisely those, or some of those, intended to be accomplished by the gospel of Jesus Christ. To make God every thing and man nothing; to set Jehovah on "a throne high and lifted up," and to lay you and me in the dust; to give the great Creator his own glory and the petty creature his own place—the gospel aims at this, at this chiefly and this supremely, and so does the darkness that hangs over the hereafter. View this, or view any of God's dispensations in their true light, they have the same objects in view as the gospel has, they all meet in the same point. The same hand is seen in them, the same design manifested, the same God over all is revealed and glorified. It is no mark then of a spiritual mind to despise these common-place truths. He has learnt the most of the gospel, who looks the most for the God of the gospel

in every thing ; who recognizes him where others see him not, and turns all his dispensations, all truths and all events and circumstances, to the holiest account.

III. We have yet another point before us—*the influence which our ignorance of futurity ought to have on us.*

1. *It should check us from presuming on the future.* It says to us most plainly and loudly, “You are all wrong. You are treating that as certain, which is uncertain. You are calculating for weeks, and months, and years, before you ; but there may not be a day before you ; or if there are many days, you know not what one of them will be, not even that which is the nearest to you. You know not what shall be on the morrow. Boast not therefore of the morrow. Presume not on its coming, much less on its being the morrow you expect.”

But we must not push things to extremes. The Bible never does so. It lays truth before us and says, “Receive it ; act on it ;” but it does not say, “Look at this truth only ; let nothing else influence you besides this.” Thus in the present case—the future is for the greater part hidden from us ; we are not therefore to presume on the future ; we are not to lay our plans, as though times and circumstances were at our disposal. And yet in half the things we do, we must look forward ; we must act for the future, and often for a remote future, even distant years to come. How otherwise would the system of life go on ? Instinct teaches even the brute creation to look forward. “The ant provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.” And reason bids us do the same. It is not our duty for the morrow, our labouring to be provided for it, that is condemned ; it is our dependence on it. “Go to now,” the apostle says, “ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain ;”—and what evil is there in this ? Great evil, brethren, not in the buying and selling, not in the foresight and diligence, not in any thing we find expressed here, but in an omission we find here—there is no reference here to God. There is presumption in these men, for these men have left uncertainty, and consequently they have left God, out of their schemes. They feel sure of life, they calculate on gain and success as a matter of course from their own resources, and in this lies their sin. This constituted the boasting and rejoicing which the sixteenth

verse speaks of as "evil." A slight addition to it would have made this sinful language right. The apostle does not tell them, "Ye ought not to say this." He only says, "Ye ought to say one word more—If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that."

What this scripture says to us is, Act as wise men. You know little or nothing about the future; do not act as though you knew it all. Your life is a vapour, a light, fleeting, unsubstantial thing; do not treat it as though it were a solid, permanent reality. You are not sure of being alive to-morrow; cease to calculate on being alive to-morrow. Build not on a fallacy. Do not get on a quicksand, and act as though you were on a rock. Do not say, "The world and the world only now; my soul a few years hence." Where are the years you speak of? God grant you may see them and become in them all you anticipate! but this you and I both know, that there may be a grave between you and them; that you may be lying dead in it before this very year is gone. O the madness of our hearts, brethren! What fools can men become, when men live estranged from God! We know that we shall die; we know that we may die in a day or an hour. We would deny it if we could, but it is not to be denied or concealed. And yet how do we live? Tell me, were the sentence of mortality against us to be repealed, or were we this moment to be in any way secured from it for a thousand years to come, what would the next week of our life be? In many cases, precisely like the past. Our situation would be changed, wonderfully changed; our conduct would be the same. What then are we? Wise men? So say at times our own vain hearts; but there is a still small voice from above, that whispers secretly to each of us and says, "Thou fool!"

2. Our ignorance of the future *should check too our anxiety for the future.*

Whatever the divine dispensations may be, we may be sure of this, that there is always naturally in our hearts a strong repugnance to them. They are all intended to exalt God, and to exalt him, as we conceive, at our expence; we feel them degrading to us, and consequently we dislike them. And some measure of this dislike of them continues even in the renewed mind. There is a frequent effort even in the holiest of men to

set them aside or to rise above them. It is thus in the case before us. "I will hide the future from you," says God. "You shall never know what a day will bring forth." "Thy will be done," says the man of God; "I am content to be thus ignorant." But look at him. He is dejected and care-worn, feverish through the day and sleepless through half the night; and what has made him so? He has been trying to set aside God's will; he has been groping into the future; he has looked, as he thinks, into coming years; and that has made him wretched. He fancies he has seen there calamity and misery. "In a situation like mine," he says, "I must be blind not to discover the sorrows before me. I do not pretend to know all the future, but this I must know—a man at the close of day might as well remain ignorant of coming midnight—that it will be to me a future of desolation and wretchedness. The prospect of it harasses and dismays me." Need I lay open to you, brethren, the secret of your disquietude? It is simply this—you are invading God's province; you are labouring to penetrate what he has determined shall lie concealed; and your sin is your punishment. If you would find rest for your souls, you must turn from the scenes your imagination has painted, to God. They, you may be almost sure, are unreal; he, you are quite sure, is near to help you in any scenes, to carry you through any troubles, and uphold you in any sorrows. You must substitute faith for thought, trust for inquiry, and for all the foresight you think you have gained, submission. All you know of futurity is not worth a beggar's mite. It is a delusion, and a tormenting one. You must be content to be without it. Here is your consolation, "the Lord knoweth the way that you take." "He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness." He foresees all that is coming on you in it, and he has provided for all; yes, he provided for every want and sorrow you can ever know, before you came into being, and has left you nothing to care about but this, "to win Christ and be found in him;" to lay hold of his salvation; to hold fast by him for a few short, stormy years, and then to enter into his everlasting joy. Look forward you may, but let it not be into the low, dark valley of uncertainties that lies immediately before you—a confused, misty scene you cannot penetrate; look over it. Lift up your eyes to the bright hills that rise beyond it. There they are, resting on their everlasting

foundations, and O the blessedness of even a distant glimpse of them! We no longer heed then the valley's darkness or the valley's roughness. We rather say, "There is light, there is rest, there is heaven, before us;" and go on our way rejoicing.

SERMON VIII.

THE EPIPHANY.

THE BARREN FIG TREE.

ST. LUKE XIII. 7, 8.—"Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also."

OUR liveliest feelings perhaps on entering a new year, are those of thankfulness for the goodness and mercy, the abounding goodness and never failing mercy, which have brought us hitherto. But there are other feelings which ought to have a place in our minds at this time. We have blessings to be answerable for as well as thankful for—personal blessings, family blessings, national blessings, and, above all, spiritual privileges and blessings. It is of these last, that the parable in the text speaks; and our church also is now speaking to us of them. By calling on us to commemorate the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, it reminds us of the privileges which we enjoy above our heathen fathers in consequence of that manifestation. The Lord grant that we may leave these walls this morning impressed anew with our deep responsibility for them!

"A certain man," says our Lord, "had a fig tree planted in his vineyard." This certain man represents God, this fig tree a nominal Christian.

I. Notice *the situation of the tree*, the place where it stands. It is in God's vineyard, and our Lord tells us how it came there.

The vineyard was not its natural situation. It did not spring up there, nor was it brought there by accident. God himself had it planted there. An emblem, brethren, of our situation at this hour, and of the way in which we came into it. You and I are in God's vineyard. We are standing in the midst of God's church, and it is God himself who has placed us in it. Our spiritual privileges are not things of course. They are not, like the air and the light, our natural inheritance, the common bounties of God's providence. Look through the world—how many of our fellow-creatures can we find, who are blessed as we are? The heart aches as we attempt to answer the question. It is no vineyard, it is a wilderness, in which the great mass of our fellow-sinners are standing, a desolate wilderness; whereas we in Christian England and in this Christian parish, are in a cultivated and fertile field, or rather in a garden which the Lord has taken out of that wilderness, and set apart for himself.

II. See next *what is expected from this tree*. Is it that it shall take root and grow where it is planted, and receive the showers of heaven as they fall on it? We may say, Yes; but God says, "No, this will not satisfy me; what I want of it is fruit—not wide-spreading branches and luxuriant foliage; the wild fig tree of the desert will give me these—I must have of that tree something answering to the situation in which I have placed it, and to the care and pains I have bestowed on it. I come to it seeking fruit."

And what is this fruit? It is not those things which some of us perhaps have now in our minds, the social and moral virtues, charity, honesty, and such like. These are all good in their way, but these are fruits of nature's growth. The wild fig tree will produce them. The heathen and idolater will bring them forth. The tree our Lord speaks of, is a tree in a vineyard, a planted and cultivated tree, and something more than fruit of this common kind is expected from it.

Turn to the fifth chapter of Isaiah. God is described there as enclosing and planting a vineyard for himself. He goes to it for fruit, and he finds it, but of what kind? Of just the same kind as these vines would have produced if he had left them alone, if he had suffered them to grow in the desert in nature's wildness. Twice over he says, "I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes;" and for this he

lays that vineyard waste. So with us. Social virtues and heathen virtues will not satisfy God in us. He wants fruit from us corresponding to the privileges he has bestowed upon us; not only more fruit than any heathen could render him, but fruit of another kind, Christian fruit, such fruit as nothing but the gospel of Christ can produce, and none but men planted in his church and brought under the influence of that gospel, ever yielded him.

He addresses us in his gospel as sinners. He makes himself known to us as the sinner's Saviour and God. He tells us that he is full of pity and love for sinners, and has done more for them than for any other creatures in his universe; and what he demands from us is, that we should feel towards him and act towards him as sinners ought to feel and act towards such a God. He wants in us sorrowful hearts for the sins we have committed against him, and believing hearts to embrace and confide in the love he bears us, and thankful hearts to praise and adore him for the wonderful mercy he has shewn us. The husbandman desires from his vines and fig trees such fruit as will testify to every beholder of the care and culture he has bestowed on them; so God desires from us such fruit as will proclaim to every one what he has done for us. Look again to the prophecy of Isaiah. There, in the sixty-first chapter, the whole work of Christ in his church is set forth; and what is the great object he is said to be aiming at in it all? It is that his people "may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." The fruits God wants in us are "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

III. And now go on to another point in the parable—*the scrutiny this fig tree draws on itself.*

Observe, the owner of the vineyard does not forget the tree when he has planted it, nor does he sit at home waiting for his servants to bring him the produce of it when there is any; he is described as coming again and again into his vineyard, and going up to this tree and examining it. "He came and sought fruit thereon;" he was anxious about the matter, anxious, not only to gather the fruit if he could find any, but also not to overlook it if there should be some.

How anxiously, brethren, do we ministers sometimes look

among our people for the fruits of the gospel ! And those who are parents amongst us, how earnestly do we watch our children in order, if possible, to find some good thing in them to gladden us ! And look at the gardener and the husbandman going over the scene of their labours, and examining, the one every field, and the other almost every tree and plant. But what is all this to the scrutiny which the living God takes of us ? Our Christian friends watch us, our unchristian enemies watch us, angels in heaven watch us, and the devils that roam the earth watch us, but none watch us like God. We do not see him as he stands by our side ; the great Observer of us is invisible and his scrutiny a silent one ; we think no more of him perhaps than a tree in our garden thinks of us as we walk by it ; but he marks every one of us every hour with the most searching attention. He listens to our words, he acquaints himself with our doings. He follows us wherever we go, from our beds to our tables, and from our tables to our occupations, then to our amusements and pleasures, and then to our beds again. We cannot for one moment get away from his eye. And all this while he is not taking a merely superficial glance at us ; he is searching our inmost hearts, looking us through and through. David felt this. "Thou art about my path," he says, "and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways. Thou hast searched me and known me ; thou understandest my thoughts."

It is surely an awful thing, brethren, for creatures such as we are, to be subject to such a scrutiny as this ; and yet there is something cheering as well as solemn in the thought of it, cheering, I mean, to the sincere and contrite soul. "I am ready to tremble," such a man says, "when I think that a holy God is continually searching me, but yet I am thankful that he thus searches me. I can sometimes find no fruit of the gospel within my heart, but even then perhaps he can. If it is there, I know he will find it. No matter how low down it lies, what corruptions hide it, with what a heap of rubbish it is mixed, if he has put any good thing in my heart towards him, he sees it in my heart ; yes, and it may be, that while I am tempted to regard myself as one of the vilest cumberers of the ground that the ground bears, cankered and blighted and fit only for the axe and the burning, it may be that my God is rejoicing over the work of his own grace in my soul ; is pointing it out to his angels, and bidding them mark how he will cherish and increase it."

IV. Observe *the marvellous patience of God with this unfruitful tree*; "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none."

There is surprise, you observe, expressed in this language; surprise, it may be, at the unfruitfulness of such a tree in such a place. And if there is a wonderful thing to be found in the universe, it is a sinner planted in the church of Christ and listening year after year to the gospel of Christ, and yet unmoved, unaffected, by that gospel, the same in heart and life as though he heard it not.

But though surprise at the sinner's unfruitfulness may be implied here, yet it is surprise at God's patience towards him, that these words seem chiefly to express. The Lord speaks in them as though he himself were wondering at his own patience. You and I, brethren, cannot estimate this patience, but consider—God has placed us in his vineyard, not secretly, but in the face of all heaven and hell. His creatures in other worlds are watching his proceedings with us. They are privy to all the spiritual mercies with which he has surrounded us, and all the means of grace and salvation he has vouchsafed us. That precious Bible he has placed in our hands, they see; the sermons that are preached to us, they hear; and as they hear them, they look on us to see their effects on us. Now for God to be, as it were, baffled in his purposes; for him to plant the tree, and the tree to bring forth no fruit; for him to be watching us week after week and year after year, longing to see this and that effect of his gospel in us, and yet never seeing it; and all the while for him to bear this, and go on bearing it—we may think lightly of such forbearance, but be assured that there is wonder in heaven and wonder in hell on account of it. The Lord did not deal thus with the angels who rebelled against him. Patience in their case was not heard of. In his righteous anger, he drove them at once into a world of darkness. But look at some of us—we have been rebels against him ever since we were born, sinning against him every hour of our existence, despising alike his displeasure and his favour, his goodness and his justice, making light of his law and light of his gospel; and yet where are we? Living still in a world of mercy, left standing even yet in the vineyard of his church, objects at this very moment of his thoughts and care. "Behold," he says, "I still come seeking fruit of thee, though I have come to thee all thy

life long and have found none." O brethren, if any of you feel at the beginning of this year that you have nothing else to bless God for, bless him for his patience, his wonderful patience, towards you. Bless him that you are still breathing the air of this favoured world, and listening still to his often heard and long despised offers of peace.

V. But mark *the displeasure expressed at last against this unfruitful tree.*

And we no sooner look at this, than we discover a new light thrown by it on the divine patience. We think little of God's forbearance with us, because we do not know how we are every moment displeasing and provoking him. We regard him as an indifferent observer of his vineyard; as a careless father of his family, as one to whom, in the multiplicity of his affairs, it is a matter of little concern how his children feel towards him or how they act; but there is no father among us, who cares for his children as God cares for us; there is no father who hates that which is evil in his children, as God hates it in us. All the time he is bearing with us, we are grieving his Holy Spirit; he is bearing with us, if I may so speak, with a tried and wounded heart, with a heart that many an anguished father can understand—it loves, but yet mourns over the object that it loves; in spite of all its fond affection for it, it is constrained to be angry with it and displeased. And this makes the displeasure of God so fearful when at last it comes. It is a displeasure which has long been kept under. It comes upon us after long forbearance with us. It is something which has triumphed over great love and great patience; not the flowing of a stream that has always had a free course, moving along in an unobstructed channel, it is a river bursting through barriers which have long dammed it up, and pouring forth its accumulated waters in a desolating heap. Look here. The patient owner of this tree becomes all at once determined on its destruction. For three years he goes up to it, searching among its leaves for fruit; he comes away disappointed, but yet silent. There is no blaming of the tree, no complaining of it. The people in the vineyard, who have witnessed all this, may have ceased to notice it, or if they still notice it, they may say, "That tree is safe. Unfruitful as it is, for some strange reason our master loves it, and so well does he love it, that he will never remove it." But all at once comes

the command, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" And what follows? Is the tree at once levelled? No; for notice,

VI. *The intercession made for it.* The dresser of the vineyard answering said unto him, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

Here we must observe that our Lord's parables, though generally very simple, are sometimes very lofty. It is easy to see that they come from a mind familiar with heavenly things, and not easily forgetting them even when stooping down to low earthly things. We think, as we read them hastily, of ourselves only and of what is going on among ourselves, but the instant we closely examine them, they lift us up; we discover that the thoughts of Christ must have been in heaven as he delivered them. Here doubtless a heavenly scene is laid open to us. There is but one Mediator who can interpose effectually between God and man. Ministers, parents, and friends, may say concerning this or that sinner, "Lord, let him alone;" but Christ is not thinking here of any of these. He has himself in his thoughts; he is anticipating his employment at his Father's right hand whither he is going. He is the vinedresser who pleads for this worthless tree to save it from destruction.

And how natural and touching are the terms in which his intercession is made! Could you follow a Christian minister, brethren, into his privacy, and hear his secret pleadings with God for the people he loves, you would find but little disposition in him to blame those among them, who have withstood his words. With feelings which none but himself can understand, he is far more ready to blame himself. "How," he says, "can I expect to see the fruits of the gospel in these men? I have not preached it among them with half the earnestness that I ought. They are unfruitful, but it is because I have been slothful. I have never really laboured for their souls." Now look to the parable. We find something like the same spirit in this great Vinedresser. Not one word does he utter against this barren tree. Not one word does he say of all the labour he has bestowed upon it. With a wonderful pity and condescension, he seems to trace its long unfruitfulness to his own neglect. "Lord, let it alone. The fault may be mine. I have not done for it all I might. Henceforth I will do

more. I will dig about it and dung it. It shall not only have all the means of fruitfulness every tree in thy vineyard enjoys, it shall have more. It shall become the special object of my labour and care."

And who can tell, brethren, what pleadings may now be going on in the unseen heavens for some of us? Who can tell what new and untried means our unwearied Lord is now declaring he will employ with us? "Lord, let them alone this year also. Leave this and that sinner in my hands one year more. I have sent him warnings, but I will send him now plainer and louder warnings. I have visited him with afflictions, I will visit him now with sharper and more cutting sorrows. The spade shall go deeper; it shall disturb the man's very roots. His conscience too I have disquieted, but now I will make his conscience a daily scourge to him. He shall not come into my house, but he shall hear something there to disquiet him; he shall not lay down his head on his pillow, but a voice within him shall say, 'Thou art a guilty, miserable man.' I have told him of my great salvation; I have offered it to him times out of number without money or price: he shall hear of it in the coming year yet more often; it shall be pressed on his acceptance with greater earnestness and force. Lord, let him alone. It may be that he will at last bring forth the fruits thou hast so long desired in him."

And then comes in these words a glancing at the glorious consequences that would follow. "If it bear fruit, well," our translators say, but there is no word answering to "well" in the original. Our Lord does not say what would follow the fruitfulness of this tree. He breaks off as though he could not say. It seems as though all the glory and delight resulting to his Father and himself from a sinner's salvation had rushed into his mind and silenced him. "If it bear fruit—O the happiness for that poor sinner, and O the unutterable joy for thee and me!" There is a similar passage in the nineteenth chapter of this gospel. Christ is weeping over Jerusalem. "If thou hadst known," he says, "even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!" O what misery, he seems to intimate, would have been saved that wretched city, what guilt escaped! What blessedness would there have been within its walls, and what joy in heaven on its account!

But mark—it is only a year that the Intercessor asks for this

tree, one year, a limited season. After that, he says, he will interpose no longer; and more—he will acquiesce in the sentence of its destruction; “Thou shalt cut it down.”

I know not, brethren, how this language may strike some of you, but there seems to me something very fearful in it. Who is it that promises here to acquiesce after a little in the entire destruction of every unfruitful hearer of God’s truth among us? It is none other than he who has shed his heart’s blood for our salvation, and who has all our life long been pleading that we may be spared. It is painful to have a kind earthly friend give us up, but to be given up, and given up to certain destruction, by the blessed Jesus, the kindest of all friends, one who bears with and loves us as none but himself can bear and love—think what we will of it, there is something appalling in this. It is like a father who has cherished fondly a son, a worthless son, while all around have been calling out for justice on him—it is like that father’s being at last forced to say, “I can hold out no longer. I can do no more. Let justice have him.”

And here the parable ends. The fate of this tree, you perceive, is left in uncertainty; we know not the result of the Vine-dresser’s intercession and care. And who, as he looks round on this congregation, can tell how it will be at the last with many assembled here? Of some we can say with almost certainty, “It will be well with them. Let me die their death, and let my last end be like theirs.” They are now bringing forth the fruits of the gospel, and we want nothing more to assure us that the gospel will save their souls. There is that in them which tells us that God even now delights in them, as a man delights in the fruitful tree he himself has planted; that he will watch over them, and keep them, and gather fruit from them with joy for ever. Let such see in this parable what they owe to him. Let them see what they owe to him also who has interceded for them, and digged round them, and made them by his grace and Spirit what they are. Let them seek to bring forth more abundant fruit to the glory of their Saviour and their God.

As for you whose character and end are doubtful, you may see here why they are so. Ask some of your Christian neighbours, the very men perhaps who are now sitting by your side, whether they would have their souls in your souls’ stead; they would tell you, if they told you any thing, “No, not for worlds.”

And if you asked them why not, their answer would be simply this, "The gospel of Jesus Christ has had hitherto no visible, no decided effect on you. We cannot see that it has done any thing whatever within your hearts." You have heard it, brethren, as others have; you have acknowledged it perhaps as others do, to be a blessed and glorious gospel, but when we say to you, what has it done for you? has it really convinced you of your sin? has it broken your hearts? has it beaten down your self-righteousness, and that self-confidence and self-love within you, which nothing else could ever shake? has it filled you with self-loathing? has it caused the world to seem poor to you, and Christ precious, and heaven near? has it made a breach between you and all sin, and put within you a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, which nothing but righteousness can satisfy?—when we ask you such questions as these, and you say "No" to them, or wish to put them away and give us no answer at all, then we must tell you as you look forward to years to come, that darkness hangs over them; we know no more how it will be with you when this year ends, than we know whether the day which ends it, will be a cloudy or a bright one. O may the God of all grace excite in you this year, or rather this day, close and prayerful thought! "What shall I eat? What shall I drink? Wherewithal shall I be clothed? Where shall I bestow my fruits and my goods?" Beloved brethren, have done with these miserable questions. Put them aside. Take up others. "Where am I? What am I? Where and what shall I be when all my years on earth are ended? Will it be well with me at the last, or would it have been good for me never to have been born?" These are questions worth the asking. O that you felt them to be such! O that from this moment you may never know one hour's inward rest, till you have obtained from the living God something like a peaceful answer to them!

SERMON IX.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

CHRIST THE DESIRE AND GLORY OF HIS CHURCH.

HAGGAI II. 6, 7.—“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations; and the Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.”

WHEN the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon, they found their city and temple in ruins. Their city they at once set about rebuilding, but not their temple; or if they began to rebuild it, the work soon stopped. Their own houses one after another rose up, but there still lay the house of the Lord, that “holy and beautiful house where their fathers worshipped,” thrown down and desolate. Like all selfish men, they had an excuse. The time, they said, was not come. But God sends this prophet to tell them that, in his view of the matter, the time was come, that he expected them to build his house as well as their own, and that he would go on visiting their land, just as he had done, with famine and drought till they had built it. At the same time he encourages them; and here in the text is the encouragement he gives them. And what is it? It is another prophecy of the Messiah. “Build me a temple,” he says, “and the Lord whom ye seek, shall come to that temple.” “The Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.”

I. Here is in this prediction *the time when our Lord was to come.*

“It is a little while,” says God; and when did he say this? As the song of the angels was about to burst forth over Bethlehem? or just as Gabriel was drawing near to receive his command to go down to Mary at Nazareth? No, it was five hundred

years before. Why then does the Lord call this long period "a little while?" We answer, it was a short period *compared with the time the church had already been kept waiting for the Messiah*. More than three thousand years had now passed since it had been first told to expect him, and still he was not come.

It was short too *in Jehovah's own sight*. Generally in his word he adapts himself to our notions of things, speaking to our minds rather than from his own; but sometimes he appears to forget us and our littleness; he speaks out of the depths of his own fathomless mind, and then what we deem great things become small, mountains are dust, nations are drops, ages are moments. Five hundred years are called "a little while," and five thousand would be called the same. And this puts a stamp of verity and divinity on God's word. It is not man's word, it cannot be, for things are frequently measured in it by a standard which man never uses.

II. Observe next in the prophecy *a solemn circumstance that is to attend the Messiah's coming*.

"I will shake the heavens," the Lord says, "and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations." Now what is this mighty shaking? Here again we must think of the divine greatness. He who spake these words, is the eternal God. He has all times and all events ever present before him. It must be expected therefore that there will be frequent allusions in what he says to scenes long past. Such appears to be the case here. He introduced the Mosaic dispensation with a scene of awful grandeur: On a quiet day clouds and darkness suddenly thickened on the summit of a mountain. Unearthly thunders rolled and flames of mysterious fire blazed around it. Down to its very roots the whole mountain shook with seeming terror. The wondering people, we are told, could not bear the sight—they also, and Moses with them, "exceedingly feared and quaked." Now something like this, the Lord says, shall attend the coming of his Son and the bringing in of his gospel—there shall be a shaking, and a shaking which shall affect, not a mountain, but a world.

This language has been interpreted as pointing out those political convulsions and changes which agitated the world between the uttering of this prophecy and our Lord's birth, one

great empire giving way to another, and that in its turn yielding to a third. St. Paul however applies it, in his epistle to the Hebrews, to the uprooting and destruction of the whole Mosaic dispensation. And he lays a stress on the word "once" in the text. It shews, he says, that the threatened destruction of this dispensation shall be complete and final. All the Jewish institutions shall be swept away, and swept away once for ever, to the end that a new and permanent order of things in the church may be established. And how exactly has the prophecy in this application of it been fulfilled! The temple, this most glorious temple that Christ came to and honoured, in one terrible hour shook and fell, and neither it nor its sacrifices or ordinances have ever been revived.

But we may perhaps put another interpretation on this prediction. There may be a further reference in it to those moral and spiritual effects which have ever attended and followed the gospel in its progress through the world. Wherever it has come, it has come with a shaking. It has startled the world, surprised it and changed it. So was it in the apostles' days. The kingdoms of the earth wondered at them; their idols trembled and fell before them; nearly all the Roman empire eventually cast off its heathenism and embraced the cross. It was the same at the reformation from popery. The gospel had been buried, buried alive, as it were, beneath the rubbish of papal superstitions; it pleased God by means of a few faithful men to bring it out of its grave, and civilized Europe was throughout agitated. And it is the same now in every land and in every place wherever "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" is for the first time faithfully and zealously published. Men do not and cannot all listen to it as though they were stones. A sensation of some kind is almost sure to be produced by it, and, in some cases, a most holy and happy one.

And let the gospel of Jesus Christ once really find its way into a sinner's heart, O what a convulsion, what a complete uprooting and change, does it often effect there! All the long cherished indifference of that heart towards God, and eternity, and its own best interests, passes away. Pride, and prejudice, and hatred of God's truth, are shaken and thrown down. The heart becomes like a city which has just felt the shock of an earthquake, or rather it is like Sinai in the wilderness, when God stood on it in his majesty and thundered from it his law.

I am not speaking, brethren, of any thing enthusiastic or in appearance violent. I am speaking of that deep, inward, spiritual change which every man experiences, who rightly receives the gospel of God's dear Son; a change which makes him, in the language of scripture, a new man, "a new creature," new in his principles, new in his feelings, new in his affections, new in his temper and habits, new in almost every thing. Some of you well understand what this is. Would that you all did! You will never understand the blessedness of Christ's gospel till you do. Strange as it may seem, it is an unspeakable mercy to have a shock like this given to the soul; to have the high imaginations and proud hopes of the soul laid low. It is a blessed thing to have the gospel cutting and piercing the heart. This is a sure sign there is One coming in love and mercy to heal the heart. These flashes of lightning, these terrors and perplexities, will turn in the end, says an old bishop of our church, to "beams of comfort and gleams of glory."

III. We may go on now to another part of the text—a *description which it gives us of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

It calls him "the Desire of all nations." This title at first may surprise us. When he came, a great part of the world had never heard of him; and those to whom he had been long promised and to whom he came, despised and rejected him: "they saw no beauty in him that they should desire him." And most of the nations of the earth reject him still. But yet this name is justly applied to our Lord.

It may intimate that in the sight of God *he is desirable for all nations*. All need him. All would desire him if they knew his excellence, the mighty power which he possesses of blessing and saving. It is a power commensurate with the wants and miseries of the whole guilty world.

Or this title may imply that *some of all nations have desired him*. The expectation of him was not confined to the Jewish people. There had been those elsewhere, who had looked forward with earnest desire to his coming, to the coming, at least, of some great deliverer. And when he appeared, few as they were who welcomed him, they were not all of one place or nation. He was born in Judæa, but wise men come from the east and do him homage, a woman of accursed Canaan falls down and worships him, and a Roman soldier owns his great-

ness, deeming the doors of his habitation unworthy to receive him. To say nothing of present times, of men scattered over all the earth adoring and blessing him, look back to little more than half a century after his crucifixion. Even then there was a great multitude seen in heaven "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues;" and they all sang one and the same song, one loud song of joy and delight in this universal Saviour.

But we must look forward for a full explanation of this title. *All nations will desire this Saviour.*

I have just said that all times and all events lie ever open before the Lord. And this is true of the future as well as of the past. And the Lord often speaks in his word with a reference to the future as well as the past. We know not what was specially in his mind when he uttered these words, but there might be in it a whole converted and happy world. That the whole world is eventually to be converted, scripture assures us; and it assures us also that when converted, Christ will be every where desired, adored, and rejoiced in, throughout it. "Unto him," we are told, "shall the gathering of the people be." "In him shall all the families of the earth be blessed." "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." "All nations shall call him blessed." Now imagine these prophecies fulfilled, let this glorious scene be realized, bring before your minds a holy and rejoicing earth, and then cast your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ, its holy and rejoicing King—what would you call him? Just what the great God, the Lord of hosts, calls him here, "the Desire of all nations," the joy of the sons of men, the one great blessing, hope, and comfort, of a regenerated world.

It is well, brethren, when the heart responds at once to these glorious titles of the Saviour. How poor sometimes do our laboured explanations of them seem! "Tell us not," you are ready to say, "why our blessed Lord is called the Desire of the nations: you might as well tell us why the sun is called the world's light. We feel that he is all our salvation and all our desire. O that we longed for him more! O that we rejoiced in him more! O that the time were come when he should be the Lord of every feeling of our hearts!"

IV. The last thing we have to notice in the text, is a *glorious consequence of the promised Redeemer's advent.*

“The Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.” In the ninth verse this promise is repeated and in yet stronger terms; “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts.”

The former house here referred to was the temple of Solomon. This, in external splendour, must have exceeded every building of which there is any record. And besides this, it had within it various things which gave it a higher and indeed an unearthly glory. There was the holy fire on one of the altars, kindled at first from heaven and never extinguished. There was the sacred ark with the tables of the law in it, written by the hand of God. More glorious still, there was the bright cloud shining over the mercy-seat, a symbol of the ever present Jehovah. A thoughtful Jew, as he trod these courts, must have often felt, nothing below heaven can be higher than this. Besides, at the dedication of this temple, the Lord had come down visibly into it, and with a burst of glory filled it with his presence. Well therefore might the people, when this wonderful building was overthrown, have looked on its ruins with a mournful despair, and felt the glory was departed. Even when with sorrowful hearts they had begun to raise it up again, how often must they have been tempted to desist from a remembrance of its former glory, and a consciousness of their utter inability to equal it again! But now comes God and bids them here, by this prophet, cast all these mournful feelings away. “Be strong, O Zerubbabel,” he says, “and be strong, O Joshua, and be strong, all ye people of the land, and work.” “Build me a house; no matter how mean it is, I will glorify it.” “The Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill it with glory.” “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts.”

And how was this magnificent promise fulfilled? “The Lord entered it,” you will say, “when it was dedicated, with a brighter glory than before. He lit up again the extinguished fire on the altar, and shone forth more splendidly than ever above the mercy-seat.” But no; the building remained for several hundred years with scarcely one miraculous circumstance of glory. The promise had no fulfilment; it seemed forgotten. But at last an infant enters that temple, brought thither from a stable and a manger, and borne in a peasant’s arms. And look again.

Thirty years afterwards there comes into it a man with marks of deep and secret sorrow written on his brow. Men shun him and scoff at him as he walks along it; and when he opens his lips to speak, they cavil at and deride him. And yet in that lowly infant, in that man of sorrows and of shame, this prophecy was fulfilled. The first temple was splendid in its gold and silver, but that was a petty splendour; its main glory lay in the traces it bore, its faint but real indications, of a present God. But here in this second temple is that God himself manifest in our mortal flesh; no shadowy, indistinct resemblance of him, but, incarnate before us, One whom he himself calls by his Spirit "the brightness of his glory and the very image of his person." The long waited for "Consolation of Israel," "the Desire of all nations," is here, and his mere presence here throws a splendour around this building the earth never saw before. One thought of heaven makes this plain. What gives that lofty world its chief glory? Its burning thrones, and its rivers of crystal, and its white-robed worshippers, and its angels of light? No; "behold, the tabernacle of God is there with men." The infinite Jehovah reveals himself there in his exalted Son. "The glory of God," says the Spirit, taking up the idea and almost the language of this text, "the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

We may now make a two-fold application of this scripture.

It shews us, first, *wherein consists the chief glory of any church*. It consists in the presence and manifestation within it of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his bodily presence indeed he is removed far away from us. The heaven of heavens has received him, and there high above all things he lives and reigns. But there is a spiritual manifestation still made of him in our world through his gospel; and it is this, which gives our churches their real glory. It matters not whether we speak of national churches, or of smaller communities of Christians, or of the mere buildings in which we worship, this is true of them all. We love our own national church. God grant we may ever love it! Never was church more worthy of a nation's love. But what clothes the church of England with so much excellency and beauty? The honour the state puts on it? its endowments? its antiquity? the homage it has received from successive generations? No, brethren. We despise not these things, but if

these were all the excellencies the church of England had to boast of, let it fall to-morrow, we would hardly stretch forth a hand to save it, or shed a tear for it when gone. It is the exhibition it makes in all its services of a glorious Saviour, it is the clear and strong light in which it holds the Lord Jesus Christ forth to guilty man as guilty man's only hope—this is our church's glory; and God grant that this glory may shine in it brighter and brighter even to the world's end! Reforms we may want in it, but O brethren, let them be reforms which exalt nothing in our church above Christ, and put no veil on Christ's glory and greatness. Innovations seem to be threatening us. The worst perhaps that could threaten us, are those which would substitute rites and ordinances for a Saviour's blood, penances and superstitious observances for his grace, a form of godliness for a heart-warm love for him, and an outward devotion for practical obedience to his will. We may cover our land with churches, but all experience says, they will do the land no good if the glorious gospel of Christ is not proclaimed within them: we may half fill these churches with ministers, experience tells us again, those ministers will be scourges rather than blessings among us, unless they are men who count "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

This scripture tells us also *wherein consists the chief happiness of every really Christian heart.*

When this promise was made to the Jews, they were in a very low and distressed condition. True, they had been delivered from a long and wretched captivity, but what were they? A mere remnant of a nation. And where were they? Among the ruins of their overthrown city, weak, poor, and almost friendless, with powerful enemies all around deriding and assailing them, and the judgments of God, drought and famine, afflicting them. This prophet comes to them with a command and with comfort from their God. The command is to "go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the Lord's house;" and their comfort is—what? A most strange one—an assurance that the Messiah is ere long to be born and appear among them. Here is a harassed, distressed, half-famished people comforted, not with a promise of deliverance and plenty, but "I will shake all nations," says God, "and the Desire of all nations shall come." This is to be their consolation in their affliction—a coming Saviour.

Now what does God say to us here? That he has no higher comfort for a sorrowful soul, than to tell it of Jesus Christ; that every sorrowful soul, in its most pressing wants and deepest distresses, may think of Jesus Christ and be comforted. All things without him are as nothing, brethren. Some of you have often felt and acknowledged them to be nothing. God would teach you to-day by this scripture, that Christ, almost without any thing else, is enough; yes, and in the midst of sorrow and desolation may be felt to be enough. This is not enthusiasm, it is experience, it is fact. O that as you think of a Saviour promised, and a Saviour born, and a Saviour coming again—O that you could say, “That Saviour is mine, and, having him, I am content. He fills the heavens and he fills his church with glory; he will fill me with all things I really need, with more than I can ask or think!”

SERMON X.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

CHRIST STANDING AT THE DOOR.

REVELATION III. 20.—“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

THIS is a wonderful text. Well may it begin with that word of admiration, “Behold.” But though wonderful, it is very simple. Picture to yourselves a house with its inhabitant at home, but its door shut. That house represents man’s heart, the dwelling-place of his thoughts, desires, and feelings. And then imagine that you see a stranger coming up to this house, and standing outside its door, and knocking at it. Something answering to this is going on in our case. There is one come up to us, there is a stranger at our door.

I. The first question we must ask is, *Who is he?*

It is clear that he is some one of importance. "Behold," he says, "I stand at the door; I who could never have been expected to stand there." He speaks, you observe, as though his coming to us would surprise us; just as we might suppose a monarch to speak at a beggar's door. And there is a reason for this. It is the glorious Redeemer who is here, the Monarch of earth and heaven. And his dignity is in his thoughts at this time, for in the next verse he reminds us of it. He talks of his throne, and of his sitting on that throne together with God his Father.

"But how," you may ask, "can he be in heaven and on earth, on his throne above and at our door, at the same time?" I answer, in his bodily presence he cannot. In this sense, he is in heaven, and in heaven only; and there, we are told, he must remain till "the restitution of all things." But he is the infinite God as well as the Son of Man; and being such, there is no limiting or confining of him. He can go any where; or rather he needs not go any where, for he is every where, and that every moment. "You see me not," he says to us now in this text, "but, behold, I am among you. I am as really among you as the minister who is speaking to you. I am as near to every one of you, as your child or your friend who is seated by your side; yea, I am nearer: I am within you, at the very door of your hearts. Behold, I, the everlasting Saviour; I, the Creator of all things, who with a word called your earth into being, and planted the sun in the heavens, and bid the stars to roll; I who uphold all things by the word of my power; I, the great King of kings and Lord of lords, at whose feet all heaven bows down, at whose presence all hell trembles; behold, I am at the door."

See then how this text sets forth at the very outset of it, the divine mercy. We think it a great thing that God should sit on a throne waiting for sinners to come to him, but here he describes himself as coming to sinners. He is not now the prodigal's father running to meet his returning son; he is that father going to that son before he thinks of returning; standing by his side in the far country among the swine and the husks. "You will not come to me," he says to us; "behold then, I come to you. Even now I stand at your door."

II. Our next question must be, *What is the Lord Jesus doing at our door?*

In the foregoing chapter he says, "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts;" and had he not told us why he is come to us, we might have supposed that he wishes to inspect our hearts more closely; to look into them for some secret lust yet undiscovered, or to search some dark corner not yet explored. But he says, "No; I am not come to you now for any such purpose. I come not as a judge, but rather as a petitioner. I want to be received within you. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. I am knocking for admittance." And this implies something on our part, and something also on his.

On our part, it implies this mournful fact, that *our hearts are all naturally shut against Christ*, yea, fastened, bolted and barred, against him. The world, brethren, has never to knock there. Sin has no need to stand there and say, "Let me in." The door is open to them at all times. But when the blessed Jesus draws near, O how closely does the heart shut itself up against him! Our language perhaps is, It is kind in you to come, and merciful, and gracious; we thank you for it; but go away; there is no room here for you. "Come in, ye vanities," says the soul, "that have so often deceived and mocked me; come in, ye cares and anxieties that have so many times distressed me and weighed me down; come in, ye idols of my heart, that I have again and again resolved should never be admitted more; come in and welcome, any thing that is base and earthly; I will cherish you; but my holy Lord I must shut out. I know he ought to be let in, but this crowded heart of mine can find no place for him. It will not, it cannot, receive him."

On Christ's part, this expression implies *a willingness to enter our hearts*; and more than a willingness, an earnest desire to enter them. He not only stands waiting at the door, ready to come in; but he calls there and knocks there, unwilling to be kept out.

By "the door" we are to understand the various inlets of the soul; those parts and faculties of it, which, as it were, admit things into it. And by knocking at these is meant appealing to them, trying them, endeavouring to get into the heart by means of them. There is our understanding, for instance, or judgment—Christ knocks at that by shewing us that it is reasonable we should admit him, that it is our duty and interest to do so. And then there are our affections—he appeals to them. "I have loved you," he says, "and given myself for you. I have been

wounded and bruised, I have bled and died, for you. Do not, after this, shut me out. You would be ashamed to shut out the father who cared for you, and the mother who nourished you; but I have done more for you than father, and mother, and all the world besides." He tries our hopes. "I will bring in with me," he says, "blessings innumerable." And, at other times, our fears. "There is danger," he says, "in rejecting me. It will be your condemnation and ruin to send me away."

The means whereby he does all this are various. His word is one of them—the chapters you read, and the sermons that are preached to you. And his mercies are another—the mercies of his providence. And afflictions also. It is sad that the Lord Jesus should be constrained to knock at our hearts by these; it is sad that the scourge should be needed to force open our hearts to one like him; yet so it is. He seldom gets far into our hearts till he has torn and smitten them; he seldom gets into them at all till sorrow has gone in first. "You will not let me in," he says; "and why? You have not room for me; your heart is full of idols. Well then I will send death to take away those idols, or I will send poverty or something else to drive them out. I will strip you of the things you love; and then when your soul is empty, and aching, and desolate, when you are looking around every where for a comforter and can find none, I will come again and say, Now will you admit me? There is room now; now let me in."

Conscience also is another of Christ's instruments. There are times, brethren, when our own minds seem to acquire a wonderful power over us. It is in the silence of night perhaps, or in the loneliness of solitude. We would think of other things, but something rises within us and constrains us to think of eternity and our God. It tells us that all is not as it should be with us, and will not end as we would have it. The world, this poor empty world, appears for an hour in its true character. It is felt to be a thing of nought, and our life in it a dream, and we ourselves fools and madmen for making so much of it. And our souls too are thought of, our precious but well nigh forgotten souls. And O how do they seem to reproach us for our cruel neglect of them! "This will never do," conscience says. "If you go on as you have done, you will perish, and perish everlastingly, and perish soon. Your life is passing rapidly away. There is the grave and an eternal world at hand. Where will

you soon be?" When therefore conscience speaks thus to us, it is Christ that bids it speak thus. He speaks to us by it. He is taking hold of it, and knocking by it at our hearts.

And observe how patiently he does all this. It is not one knock that satisfies him, or two knocks. "Behold, I stand and knock." The language seems to convey the idea of habit, continuance; "Behold, I have been standing and knocking at this door for a long time, and continue to stand there. I have been here for hours; yea, for days, and nights, and months, and years."

The Lord Jesus is not like us. We may be kind, but we are not patient in our kindness, not long-suffering. We seek to do others good, but after a little, when they continue obstinate and perverse, we give them up. There is no helping them, we say, they must take their own course: and we can say this even of a brother or a child. But not so Christ. He acts towards sinners as though he were most unwilling to leave them, as though he could do or bear any thing rather than abandon them; nay, he speaks as though he could not abandon them. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, or surrender thee up, Israel?" "I cannot do it," he seems to say. Every feeling of his soul is agitated and pained at the thought. "Mine heart," he cries, "is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together." And in the same spirit he speaks in this text. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. You may think that I am only just come, but recollect—I have been here all your life long. I came to you in your very childhood. I said to you then, 'My son, give me thine heart. I love them that love me. They that seek me early, shall find me.' But you turned me away. You said it was too soon then to admit me: childhood was an age of folly, and folly must have its day. I came again to you in your youth. I knocked then yet louder for admittance, and you heard me; but you gave me no answer, or the same answer again—I had come too soon: youth was a day for pleasure, and pleasure also must have its day. It had it. Your youth is now gone, and business and occupations have succeeded to pleasures; yet here I still am. I still stand at your door and knock. I have knocked at it often before, and now knock again. I do it this day, this hour, this very moment, by the sermon you are now hearing, by the feelings of sorrow, or shame, or seriousness, my Spirit is now exciting in your

minds. I heed not your former neglect of me ; I heed not the many refusals and even insults you have shewn me. Repulsed and despised, here I still am, persisting in my gracious design towards you ; still asking for admittance ; still calling, entreating, reasoning, pleading, promising, reproving, warning, threatening—reluctant as ever to give you up, and anxious as ever to save and bless you.” O the amazing patience we have all experienced from the Lord Jesus ! It is as wonderful as his love itself. Well may he say, “Behold, I stand.” He comes and knocks ; he seeks us before we seek him—that is one wonder ; he stands and knocks ; he continues to seek us—that is another. And few of us think how much we owe to this patience. But for this, those among us, who have obtained mercy, would not have obtained it, for which of us opened his heart to Christ when Christ first knocked at it ? And it is owing to this, that others of us are yet within mercy’s reach. The sun of this sabbath, brethren, is now shining brightly on you ; “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” is this day preached to you ; and wherefore ? You talk of the divine grace and goodness, and you have reason to talk of them ; but O think of the divine patience also ! Were it not for this, you would be at this moment out of the sight of that sun and beyond the sound of that gospel. The grave would have your bodies, and a dark hell your souls.

III. We may now make a third enquiry—*What does this gracious Stranger at our door wish us to do ?* He knocks for admittance, and what he wants of us is, that we should open the door and let him in. By this is meant what is frequently called in scripture a “receiving of Christ Jesus our Lord.”

You know how you act when you let any one into your house. You first hear him knocking, and then you go to the door, and remove its fastenings, and throw it open to him. Now transfer this to your own hearts. Naturally Christ has no place in them ; that is, he does not dwell in their thoughts or affections. He is just as much to them as a man standing outside the door is to a house, and no more—near them, but not in them. To open the heart to him is therefore to discover that he really has been shut out of the heart, and yet notwithstanding this, is waiting to come in. It is to hear his voice in the gospel calling to us, and asking for admittance ; and then to open the heart to him, and give him admittance. The bolts

and the bars are broken. Unconcern is cast away, and hardness of heart, and prejudice against the gospel, and self-righteousness, and self-dependence, and unbelief—all those miserable things that close up the natural mind against Christ—and the mind, slowly perhaps, but willingly and at last joyfully, opens itself to admit into it Christ and his truth. It believes his declarations, confides in his promises, looks for pardon to his blood, lays hold of his righteousness, comforts itself in his intercession, and submits itself to his laws.

And this, you observe, is described in the text as the soul's own act. It is represented as our work. We are to open the door. And yet, brethren, a man has no more power in himself to throw open his heart to Christ, than a dead man has to burst open his own grave; or if he has the power, he will not use it. Sermons cannot make him do it; mercies cannot; afflictions cannot; conscience cannot. O if they could, would there be one heart here closed against him? Whenever therefore these things prove effectual, it is God himself who makes them so; and makes them so by a special exercise of his power in the heart itself. It was not Paul's preaching by the river side at Philippi, it is said to have been the Lord himself, that opened the heart of Lydia. And here in this chapter he claims, or seems to claim, this work as his own. He speaks of himself as "he that hath the key of David; he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." He can do with our hearts, he intimates, just what he pleases; and none but he can do with them to any holy purpose any thing at all.

"Why then," you may say, "does he call on us to open our hearts to him? Is not this absurd?" I answer, No. It is Christ's way to make us "workers together" with him in his good work of grace in our souls. He does all of it, but he does it by us, as well as in us. Hence he does not come and make a forcible entry into our hearts, breaking into them against our consent; he comes and knocks, and at the same time he inclines us by his Spirit to listen to his knocking, and to be affected by his goodness and patience in it, and to be won over by it, and at last to rise up and say, or rather to fall down at his blessed feet and say, "Lord, take this vile heart. Make it thine." View it in one light, the admission of Christ into a sinner's heart is as much God's work as though man did nothing in it; view it in another, it is as much man's, as though God did

nothing. Man works, but he works by a power and by a will also, that God has given him. "I drew them," says the Lord of his people of old, and with cords and bands—there is his almighty power; there he puts his own stamp on his own work—but how did he draw them? He tells us—"with cords of a man, with bands of love;" not as brute beasts that must be driven and forced, but as men, as reasonable beings, by convincing their judgments and laying hold of their hearts.

It is well however when questions of this nature do not trouble us. It is well when we lose all anxiety about them. We certainly shall lose it, if ever we are deeply humbled under God's mighty hand. "I must understand this," and "I must reconcile that," says the young man in Christ's school. "But not so I," says the old Christian. "I will not attempt it. Enough for me to receive and obey God's word. If he tells me his Holy Spirit must open my heart before his dear Son can enter in, I will implore him with my whole soul to set it open. And if he commands me to open it, I will bless him for that command. I know he will give me power to obey it. I will say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, and enter in. Long enough have the world and sin kept this house, and O what a den of uncleanness and abominations have they made it! It is strange indeed that thou shouldest desire to dwell in such a place, but here it is. If thou art willing to come into it, I am willing to have thee in it, for thy love has made me willing. O may I have thee there, and never, never lose thee."

IV. We have yet one question more to ask—*What will this exalted Being at our door do for us, if we let him in?*

In the preceding verses, we find our Lord speaking to us as a merchant, as one who has something to sell, which he counsels us to buy. He has gold for us, he says, and raiment, and medicine; and these things, he tells us, we want, for we are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." When therefore he says immediately afterwards, "Open the door to me," we are ready to think his object is, that we may take these things of him. And true it is, he does not come to our door empty-handed. "It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;" and there he stands laden with the most abundant supplies for us; with more for us than we can need, or desire, or ever exhaust. But this is not the truth

he means to convey in this text. The metaphor, you perceive, is changed. He is no longer a merchant desiring to sell to us the things we want; he stands knocking at the door, anxious to come in as our guest. He does not say, "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will heal him, and clothe him, and make him richer than an angel;" he says, "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

"I will come in to him." There his presence is promised, and with it the light, and comfort, and bliss, and glory, of it. Of these, in its present state, the heart cannot hold much, and the little it can hold, it is not always in a frame to enjoy; but O to have Christ in the heart, to have the King of glory making our unworthy souls his dwelling place, living, abiding, acting in them—whether he reveal his presence, or cloud at seasons the glory of it—who does not say, "This indeed is blessedness? I have my sorrows, but with Christ within me, I have still within me a fountain of amazing joy."

"I will sup with him," adds Christ, "and he with me." This implies a manifestation of Christ in the heart he dwells in, and intercourse and communion with it. "I will not only come in to him," he says, "but he shall know that I am come in. I will sit down with him as a companion and a friend. There shall be great intimacy and familiarity between him and me. And more—I will condescend to be entertained by him; I will share his meal. There shall be a participation of comforts and enjoyments between us."

Sometimes in scripture our Lord describes himself as preparing a feast for sinners, and inviting sinners of all kinds to come and partake of it; but here he seems to call on the sinner to make a feast for him. He invites himself to his house and table. The meaning is, that he not only imparts mercies and comforts to the believing soul, and in great abundance, but feels a delight in imparting them; he himself eats, as it were, of his own supper, feasting on those very mercies and comforts with which he blesses his beloved. In other words, their happiness increases his. We think only of our own joy when we receive Christ, but there is joy at the right hand of God, yes, and in the mind of God, on our account. We think only of the happiness of the redeemed when the last great day shall come and all the redeemed of the Lord shall be gathered in, but there will be joy unutterable in the Redeemer's own infinite

soul. The day of his appearing will be to him a day of wonderful happiness. The most joyous banquetter at the marriage-supper of the Lamb, shall be that Lamb himself. The church shall be happy, but Christ, its Lord, happier than all.

Shall we, brethren, behold this scene? "I will sup with him, and he with me"—is this true of us in any measure now? Will it be true of us in a heavenly world? Another question must be answered first—have we opened our hearts to this gracious Saviour? I need not say that he has again and again knocked at them all. There is not a man here, who has not heard his calls for admittance and almost his supplications. Many among you must be ready to bear witness to his condescension and patience. "Yes," you say, "the Lord Jesus Christ has come up to me a thousand times, offering me mercy." Beloved brethren, have you received Jesus Christ and his mercy? It sometimes happens that his calls to us are so frequent, that we learn to despise them. His mercy is proclaimed to us so often, that the proclamation of it becomes at last like a thrice heard tale. "Behold," he cries, as though he were saying a wonderful thing, as though he expected all earth and heaven to be astonished at his words, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock;"—we listen to him as though he were saying something not at all wonderful, no, nor even worth our attention. O to be proof against the marvellous condescension and grace of Christ; to sit here or elsewhere where Christ's gospel is preached, and to have our hearts year after year unaffected by it, and becoming more and more indifferent to it the longer we hear it; to be easy and unconcerned while others by our side are ready to weep or tremble!—a heavier calamity could not fall on us. Ours is a mournful and a dreadful case. A reckless mind, a seared conscience, a hardened heart—one step more, and then comes a lost soul. And something must soon come. Things will not go on with you for ever as they have been going on. There is a call from heaven, that will be the last call. There is an offer of mercy from Christ, that will be the last offer. And there is a striving too of his Spirit—very faint perhaps, hardly felt, soon overcome—a striving of Christ within you, that will be the last. Look once again to the text. He says in it, "I have been standing here and am standing here yet;" but he does not say, "I will continue to stand." He almost says the reverse; "I am just going; ere long I am gone. You

forget that I am only in a standing position. I have not sat down at your door. I am ready to come in, and ready to go away. It would not become me to be for ever a suppliant to sinners. Not your threshold, the throne of glory is my home, and thither I am about to return. And if I once go, I will never come here again. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me. Between me and you there shall be a great gulph fixed. Where I am, thither ye cannot come."

O think of this, you who have stifled many convictions, and hardened your hearts against unnumbered invitations and mercies. Think not you of a standing Saviour; think rather of a departing one. He has called often after you; call now after him. He is yet within reach of your cry; yea, he still says, "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him"—"any man;" he excludes none; not even you who have so long excluded him. This very sermon is a proof that he does not. O that some of you may be led by it to open your hearts to him, and taste the blessedness of having him in them! You know not what he can be to you till you let him in. Others whom you have admitted into your hearts, have deceived, and wounded, and perhaps polluted them; but the Lord Jesus will not deceive or wound, and he cannot pollute. He will be to you what none but he can be, a portion for your soul, a satisfying and never failing portion; "the hope of glory" while you live, and "the fulness of joy" when you die.

SERMON XI.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

ISAIAH IX. 6.—“The Prince of Peace.”

THIS is one of several titles applied in this verse to the glorious Saviour. The prophet foretels in it his birth, or rather, in the strength of his faith, he exultingly proclaims it; “Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given.” Then follows the office this new-born Son is destined to fill; “The government shall be upon his shoulder;” he is to be a King. And in this character, as in every character he sustains, he is to be peculiar and wonderful. Never yet has there been a king like him. He shall reign for ever, the next verse tells us, and his government or dominions shall go on increasing for ever; and how? As other monarchs have widened their empires, by power and might? by “the battle of the warrior, and with confused noise and garments rolled in blood?” No, says the prophet, “the increase of his peace” shall keep pace with the increase of his government. He shall be unlike all other triumphant sovereigns, not only in his greatness, but in his mode of acquiring and employing that greatness; and so unlike them, that his name shall be called “the Prince of peace.” It is not his power, he intimates, which men shall most admire and wonder at in him; it is the peace he shall possess, delight in, and diffuse.

I. *He possesses peace.* He possesses it as none other does, in greater measure, the abundance of it. It is all at his command. He is the Prince or Monarch of it.

And here, brethren, we must send our thoughts upward to the quiet he enjoys in his own holy heaven. He is in a world where the noise of our strife and tumult never reaches. Discord is never known there, change is never experienced. Beautifully

indeed is his tranquillity described in the twenty-ninth psalm. Below him the admiring psalmist places a troubled sea, an image of our noisy and restless world; but, "The Lord," he says, "sitteth above those water-floods;" his dwelling place and throne are on high, in a region far above all commotions and storms. His language conveys the idea of repose, and of a repose that can never be disturbed. "The Lord," he adds, "remaineth King for ever."

And then we must try to get into his mysterious soul, and see the eternal calm which reigns there day after day, year after year, age after age, unbroken. All is as quiet within as around him. And it is not the quiet of inaction or indifference, of a clod of earth or a stone; his mind is ever working and ever feeling, and with an energy which to us is inconceivable; but yet his mind is never ruffled. There is the power of a torrent within it without the torrent's turbulence; the ocean's depth and might without a billow or a sound.

Conceive then of heaven as a quiet place, and conceive of Christ with a quiet mind in heaven, and you have the first idea suggested in the text—our glorified Redeemer possesses peace; he enjoys it; he is a peaceful Prince.

II. He is also peaceable—*he exercises peace*. The expression in the text seems intended to bring before us the gentleness of our Lord's disposition and conduct.

Look at him as he trod our earth. The meek and quiet lamb was an image of him. "He shall not strive nor cry," said the Holy Spirit concerning him before his coming, "neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets;" and well was the prophecy fulfilled. The earth had never before seen such forbearance and gentleness. Peace seemed to form his very nature. The greatest provocations could not irritate, nor the most cruel treatment of a cruel world incense him. He went like a lamb to the very slaughter. And look at him now on the throne of his glory—he is a lamb still. He calls himself such again and again, and all his conduct towards our world harmonizes with the title.

He bears long with his enemies. Many calls he gives them, which they contemn, but he calls them still. Many insults they offer him, but he exposes himself to more. We cannot estimate the extent of his patience towards our despicable world. We do

not enough try to estimate it. It is not easy to us to bear slight wrongs and provocations from one or two of our fellow-creatures even for a short time. Patience we soon find to be hard work. But the blessed Jesus is bearing the grossest provocations from a whole world of sinners, and has been bearing them without a moment's cessation for ages. Yet he is still on a throne of mercy; he is still stretching forth the hand of forgiveness to our world; he is still the world's great Benefactor and patient Saviour.

And he bears much too with his friends. We throw down the weapons of our rebellion when we become his people; we feel that we must do so, and generally we are glad to do so; but O how ready are we to take them up again! When he thwarts our will, how often do we say or almost say, We will not be thwarted! And when he afflicts us for our soul's good, how tempted are we to cry out that we will not bear it, that it is not for our good, but all against us! "Here am I, Lord; do with me what thou wilt," is the language of our lips; "I will be quiet in thy hands as a little child." But when he takes us at our word, where is our quiet and child-like spirit? A bullock unaccustomed to the yoke is not more headstrong; a wild beast of the forest entangled in a snare, is scarcely more struggling. Yet all this, and much more than this, Christian brethren, he bears with from us. We are his people still, loved with all the tenderness of his gracious heart, strengthened and comforted by him in the very midst of our perverseness, and soothed by kindness and gentleness into acquiescence with his will.

There must then be a mighty inclination to peace, where things are thus. Here on the one hand are offending friends borne with, loved, blessed; on the other hand, rebellious enemies tolerated, reasoned with, supplicated, and, on their submission, pardoned; and all this going on not on some favoured day or in some happy year, but every year, and every day, and for centuries. If we see nothing else in our glorious King, we must see in him unequalled patience. We must feel sure that he is "slow to wrath," that he is "very pitiful." He exercises peace as none other does or could exercise it; his name therefore shall be called "the Prince of peace," the peaceable, pacific Prince.

But there is more intimated in this title.

III. It implies that *the Lord Jesus bestows or dispenses peace.*

God is often called in scripture the God of that which he communicates. Only let him be the source of any blessing, the author and giver of it, and the inspired writers name him after it, they call him the God of it. Thus St. Paul styles him "the God of hope," "the God of peace," "the God of patience and consolation," "the God of all grace," because grace and all these various blessings proceed from him. And in this way may our Lord be called the Prince of peace. He is the great Peacemaker and Peace-giver. He is the author of all the peace his people enjoy. He is the great fountain of peace. There is no peace to be found by us but in him.

Our peace with God flows from him.

It is a mournful fact that by nature we are not at peace with God. Sin has made a frightful breach between him and us. It has introduced into our souls a feeling of aversion to God and his ways, and a feeling so strong, that we cannot of ourselves eradicate or at times control it. It has led every one of us into open rebellion against him, and decided opposition to him in heart and life. Hence the scripture tells us that the carnal or natural mind, the mind we are born with, is "enmity against God;" that we are "alienated from him;" and that we declare ourselves to be "his enemies by our wicked works."

The consequence of this enmity on our part against God, is enmity on God's part against us. Not that he bears ill will against us or hates us. Man hates and devils hate, but God never. The feeling is opposed to his nature. Darkness might as soon dwell with light, as one feeling of hatred against a creature he has formed, dwell in Jehovah's mind. But then, we must remember, he is the Judge of all the earth, and the Judge of all the earth must not be a shadow; he must do right. He must act in some degree towards every one he finds on it, towards you and me, according to the character we sustain. If we act as rebels, he must deal with us as rebels; he cannot admit us to his favour, though he may desire to do so; he must rather brand us with his displeasure. And it is useless to cavil at this statement. It is not the Bible only, which asserts it; a suffering world bears witness to it; the confession of a whole guilty world goes along with it. What are the sacrifices of heathen nations, their bloody rites and cruel penances? They are all efforts to propitiate an offended Deity; they all declare

with the Bible the same awful fact, that man is sinful and his God displeased.

Now in this state of things, the blessed Saviour interposes. He takes upon him our nature, and thus becomes qualified to be a mediator or peacemaker between God and us. Allied to both parties, he is a fit person to reconcile them, and he is disposed to do so at any cost. And how does he heal the breach? He "hath made peace through the blood of his cross." "I will sacrifice myself," he said, "rather than let this strife go on;" and he did sacrifice himself, and with this sacrifice God was well pleased. It so honours his law, that now, notwithstanding that law, he can shew mercy to sinners, indulge all the kindness of his heart towards them, take them into his nearest and dearest favour, and give them his kingdom. The Father can now act as a Father, the God of love manifest himself a God of love. There never was a particle of enmity in his heart against us; there is not now, if we are penitent seekers of his mercy through Christ Jesus, any displeasure in his conduct. He "was angry with us, but his anger is turned away." I, a guilty sinner, may fall down before him, and feel as sure of his love for me, as though I had never offended him, as though from the hour of my birth I had been his dutiful, obedient child.

And the same sacrifice that reconciles God to man, serves also, by the power of the Holy Ghost, to reconcile man to God.

One main reason why we hate God, is our fear of him. We know, when we begin to know any thing aright of him, that he is a holy God, and as such will not bear with our iniquities. We therefore shrink from him. We dislike him partly because we dread him. But a believing view of the sacrifice of Christ removes this fear. It meets the sinner on his own ground. It sets out as he sets out, with the admission that God is holy and sin dreadful. But "O what mercy," says the sinner, "do I see there! I have been thinking of God's anger, but what is his anger to the love which is there exhibited? God is not the appalling Being I have thought him, not the God of unmingled wrath and vengeance my fears have made him. He must be a God of mercy and wonderful mercy, or he would never have provided for a wretch like me such a Saviour." And this conviction gradually gains strength in the sinner's mind, and softens his mind, and step by step wins him over to God. It takes fear out of his heart, and puts admiration and love in its stead. It

draws him with the cords of love. It makes his whole heart, its best and tenderest affections, God's. "I cannot go on sinning," he says, "against such a Friend. Base as I am, I cannot bear the thought of thus madly flying in the face of such a God. It cuts me to the heart that I have so long been a rebel against him. The fear of him did nothing for me. True, I sometimes, like the devils, trembled at his vengeance, but, like them, I stood out against it. It never subdued, it never humbled me. But the mercy that I behold there, the sight of my abased, suffering, bleeding, dying Lord—I cannot withstand that. Lord, take this vile heart of mine. Take me, all I am and have, and make me thine." Brethren, you may not understand this, you may never have felt it; but there is not a real Christian on the face of the whole earth, who does not understand and feel it. Enquire of such a man what first brought him to love his God—he will ask you if you have a father whom you have neglected, and insulted, and braved, and all, because with the utmost love to you, he has been so good a father that he cannot bear to see you making yourself vile, plunging into misery and guilt, without saying to you, This must not be? "Then," he will say, "suppose you saw that father stripping himself of all he has; bearing indignity, suffering, and disgrace, and bearing it without a murmur; coming to you, telling you he has done all this for your sake, that he loves you though you love not him, and that he cares not what he suffers so that he can regain your love and save you from destruction; conceive of him as humbling himself before you, and imploring you to turn to him and treat him as a father—could you bear this? Could you hold out and spurn that father from you?" "Nor," says the Christian, "can I spurn from me my heavenly Father. He has borne with more from me, he has undergone more for me, he has shewed me more love, than words can tell; and hard as is this bad heart within me, it must give way; it must and shall be his."

And hence it is that St. Paul so often speaks of our being reconciled to God by the cross of Christ. He seems to have this more in his mind, than the reconciliation of God to us. He generally speaks as though the latter work were already done; as though on God's side all were effected, all displeasure gone. The main thing, he intimates, the cross has now to do, is to work on us, and soften us, and bring us over to God. "He hath committed unto us," he says, "the word of reconcilia-

tion. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

And *peace too among men*—Christ is as much the author of that, as of peace between man and God. We think not. We think that our prudence, and forbearance, and kindness, will preserve the peace of society around us, or, if by any accident it should be interrupted, they will quickly restore it; but experience comes at last and undeceives us. We discover that a stronger arm is needed here than our own. We find out that though any rash hand is able to make a wound in society, it requires a hand more skilful than our own, to heal it. Peace between man and man, the peace of families, the peace of parishes, the peace of kingdoms—it is all the work of Christ, as really so as the peace of heaven.

And it is the same also within our own breasts. *Peace of conscience and peace of mind* are his gifts. Let God once wound a heart, all the world cannot heal it; but let Christ speak peace to it, all the world cannot disturb it. It is astonishing how wretched a man may be with nothing in the world to trouble him; it is astonishing too how peaceful a child of God sometimes is with every thing around to disquiet him. But the mystery may be explained. In the one case, the soul is drawing peace from him who is the fountain of peace, it is in close communion with its Saviour; in the other, that fountain is forgotten, or something has blocked up the channel which communicates between it and the soul.

IV. *Christ delights in peace*; therefore also he may be called the Prince of it.

That frequent mention which is made of this blessing in his gospel, cannot be an accidental or unmeaning thing. It shews us how much the thought of this blessing dwells in his own mind, and how highly he values it. "Glory to God in the highest," sang the angels at his birth, and this we might have expected. Their whole souls are taken up with the contemplation of the divine glory, and their whole lives spent in the adoration of it; it was natural therefore that, in this wonderful hour, they should think of it first. But, as though entering into the new-born Saviour's own feelings, peace on earth comes immediately afterwards into their song. The glory of Jehovah first—peace next—what can magnify this blessing more?

And every thing which Christ said and did on earth, harmonized with this angelic song. We dare not say that he thought more of peace than of any thing else, but next to doing his Father's work and pleasing him, he thought of nothing so much. When his love for his dear disciples was drawn forth to the very utmost just before his death, he could not find a more precious legacy to leave them, than peace; and when he saw them again after his resurrection, he came with the same blessing, as it were, in his hand. It is still in his thoughts and on his lips. And think of that declaration of his in the beginning of the first sermon he ever preached; "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." To others the kingdom of heaven is promised, others shall be comforted; the merciful shall obtain mercy, and the pure in heart shall see God; but if Christ would shew us God's children, those who most plainly wear his image, and most resemble him, and are owned by him with the greatest joy, he sends us to the peacemakers; to those who delight the most in what he himself delights in—harmony and love.

For these four reasons then Christ may well bear the title which is here given him—he possesses and enjoys peace, he exercises and manifests it, he bestows and diffuses it, he delights in it.

And observe again, that the prophet says he shall be called by this name. It is to be no secret name, but a public, well known title. And this implies that he not only shall be all we have now described, but shall be seen and acknowledged to be such. Wherever he is worshipped as the mighty God and honoured as the everlasting Father, there he shall be adored and rejoiced in as the Prince of peace. The guilty shall come to him for peace of conscience, the wretched shall seek in him peace of mind, and the calm and happy shall ascribe to him all their serenity and happiness.

But it is not easy to bring men to this. "Why cannot I make my own peace with God?" says the proud, self-righteous soul. "Why should I be indebted to any mediator?" "And why cannot I quiet this aching heart of mine?" says another. "Why cannot I lay to rest these distressing fears, these corroding cares, these wretched workings of my gloomy mind? I must reason with myself more, and battle with myself more, and that will do it." And it is the same with contentions in families

and societies. We try to quiet them. We go from house to house and from neighbour to neighbour, thinking we can surely reason into quietness all strife and discord; and it is not till we have found that we are aggravating rather than diminishing the evil, that we feel our weakness.

Now what ought this to teach us? Not to say, "There is no peace for us: our consciences must still torment, and our griefs disquiet, and our cares oppress us; and a contentious world must be contentious still:" but rather it teaches us to look upwards for the peace we sigh for; to think of Christ as the great Peacemaker, and to seek our peace in him. It is to bring us to this, that he suffers our peace to be so often interrupted. May God grant that every interruption of it, however distressing or evil, may end in this! may be overruled to the glorifying of our blessed Lord and the abasing of ourselves! We shall have peace then; we shall have peace always when we look to our great Prince for it—peace of every kind, and in as great a measure as will be good for us. But even then the earth will not be a heaven. We may have consolation in it; "the wolf may dwell with the lamb and the leopard lie down with the kid;" but there will still be briars and thorns, yes, and beasts of prey, in our world, and we must expect still to suffer from them. We must be content to suffer. It is the same world that our Master suffered in. O that we were more content to eat of the same bread he ate in it! O that we could walk in it as he walked! as meekly and quietly! Lord, make us more like thee. Be thou indeed our Prince. Give us thy peace, and O give us with it thy patient, thy gentle, thy meek and lowly mind!

SERMON XII.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

REVELATION XX. 11, 12.—“I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

It was a visionary representation only of this august scene, that the apostle beheld: we shall behold the scene itself, the great reality. And we shall be more than spectators of it, we shall be parties in it. With some things that are written in this mysterious book, we may have little or nothing to do; they concern others but not us: with what is written here, we have every thing to do. There is not a creature in the universe, who has a deeper concern in it than ourselves. May a God of grace give to us all a solemn feeling of our interest in it!

It is the judgment of the great day, that this scripture brings before us; and in the vision the apostle had of this, we may notice,

I. *The majesty of the tribunal.*

In another passage of scripture, this is called simply a judgment-seat, but here it is “a throne,” the judgment-seat, not of an ordinary magistrate, but of a king. It is a high tribunal therefore, the very highest to which we can be brought; and if so, the sentence passed here will be a final one. There is no reversal of it, no appeal from it, for there is no loftier court to which we can take it. We accordingly call this “the last judgment;” it will never be succeeded by any other.

And this throne is said to be "a great" one ; great because it is erected for a great King, and for a great purpose—the trial of a whole world is to take place before it.

And it is "a white" throne. This may betoken both the splendour and the purity of it. Would the evangelists describe the splendour of our Lord's appearance when he was transfigured? His raiment, they say, was white, "white as the light." And would the blessed Jesus paint to us in this book the purity of his redeemed in heaven? He shews them to us "clothed with white robes." So here this throne is represented as white. It is a throne of the most dazzling brightness and the purest justice. Its very appearance proclaims it to be the throne of One who is of infinite majesty, that great Judge of all the earth who will do right.

II. Observe *the person of this Judge.*

The apostle does not name him. He seems withheld by awe and reverence from naming him. But he clearly discovers to us who he is. He tells us, in the twelfth verse, that he is God, and, in the beginning of the text, that he is God in a visible form. "I saw him," he says. This can be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in our flesh ; hidden from us now indeed by space and distance, but as discernible now by human eyes were he among us, as any one of ourselves, and as surely to be seen at a future day by every one of us, as you are now beheld by me, brethren, or I by you. "Behold, he cometh with clouds," this book says, "and every eye shall see him." "Ye shall see the Son of Man," he himself says, "coming in the clouds of heaven ;" and see him, not coming only, but when he is come, when he is on his throne. "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it"—there is not a man here whose wondering eyes will not one day behold, and clearly behold, the same awful sight.

The appointment of the Lord Jesus to be our Judge, is frequently declared in scripture. It is in perfect harmony with all the divine procedure in our world. God made the world by his Son, redeemed it by his Son, governs it by his Son, and will hereafter judge it by his Son. But this scripture intimates to us, what other scriptures plainly assert, that our Lord will not judge the world simply in his divine, but rather in his human character and form. God he must be, or he could not judge it

at all, he would not be qualified ; but he will appear, when he comes to judgment, as man. In the very same form in which he left the world, will he return to it again ; and when he places himself on what he himself calls the throne of his glory, his throne of judgment, he will sit there, he himself declares and seems to exult while he declares it, as the Son of Man. "God," says his apostle, "hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained." And how the heart warms, brethren, as we think of the Saviour's triumph in that day ! he who lay in a manger, now lifted up on a throne ; he who was one of the very lowest of the sons of men, now exalted the highest ; he whom the world spurned, hated, crucified, tried to cast out of it, now with that same world trembling at his feet ; not a creature that ever lived in it, but is beholding his majesty and feeling his power ! Here is justice, we may say, here is retribution, in the very commencement of this judgment, the very constitution of this court—the once abased, but now exalted, openly exalted Jesus, is receiving from his Father a compensation for all his former degradation and shame.

III. We have next in this vision *the dissolution of the whole material world.*

And this is described as taking place in a particular manner. The psalmist appears to use very lofty language, when he speaks of our Lord as destroying the earth and the heavens. "As a vesture shalt thou fold them up," he says, "and they shall be changed." He represents him as bringing them to an end with as much ease as a man folds up a garment, and puts it away. But here the language is loftier ; "From his face the earth and the heaven fled away." They do not wait to be destroyed. As though unable to bear the majesty and glory which have suddenly burst on them, like affrighted and confounded things, they fly at the sight of it. And not only so, "there was found no place for them," the apostle adds. The guilty earth, the heavens that have witnessed its guilt, far as they fly, cannot fly far enough from the presence of their holy Lord. Their existence is now out of character with his revealed purity and glory, and with the pure and glorious order of things he is about to establish. They would be incumbrances, blots and deformities, in his new creation. Therefore they not only fly from him, they

tremble to pieces as they fly, sink into nothing. Like the man of sin, "the wicked one," St. Paul speaks of, the Lord consumes them, not by his power, but "with the spirit of his mouth;" he destroys them, not by a blow of his arm, but by his mere appearance, "the brightness of his coming."

And this is the end of your idol, brethren. Here is what the god whom so many of you worship, will at last come to, and come to in your sight. The world you adore, is a doomed world. When you rise up at the last day, you will see it rolled together as a scroll, and perish. All you have coveted and admired in it, you will see one moment, like the vile chaff or dust, scattered away; the next moment, like something viler than the chaff or dust, annihilated, put out of being. Shall I say, what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole of such a world as this? He has gained that only, which, in the hour of his greatest need, when the dream of life is over, and his real existence is about to begin; when he sees an interminable existence stretching itself out like some boundless desert before him, and feels that he must enter, must pass into it—he has gained only that which, in this hour of his extremity, will utterly disappear; be no more to him or to any one, than a shadow that is vanished. The world would be a poor thing to make our portion, even if it were destined to last for ever, but we shall be alive ages and ages after it has perished; and if the world is our all, where then will our happiness be? where will our comfort and support be? O if ever there has been hunger and thirst felt any where, aching, craving, tormenting desires, they will be found in the worldly man's heart, when that heart is in eternity, and the world is gone!

IV. Turning again to this vision, observe, further, *the strange, vast assembly gathered together in it*; "I saw the dead small and great stand before God."

"The dead"—those who were once dead but are now alive again, brought out of their graves by the commanding voice of the descending Judge. He erects his throne, he comes down from heaven, to judge all the children of men, and before he proceeds to judge them, he collects them together, assembles them from the ends of the earth, and every one of them, so that his judgment may be at once final and complete.

It is difficult to conceive, brethren, of a multitude like this.

We cannot conceive of it. We could not place before our minds in one throng, even the few millions of living men now inhabiting our own land; much less the multiplied millions who have lived and died in it from the beginning; but here are all the millions of men who have lived and died in all the earth since the earth began, all uprising from the ground in one and the same awakening moment, and all brought by some secret, irresistible impulse to one and the same spot; gathering together, some willingly, some reluctantly; some joyfully, some despairingly; but yet gathering together, all in one vast assembly before one and the same throne. What a spectacle—a Being in the human form calling up from their graves, and compelling to stand before him, every one of the human race who has ever breathed; without difficulty, without effort, placing them all passive and powerless at his bar! Well may he say, “Ye shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power.”

“The dead small and great.” Now at last the distinctions between man and man have ceased; at least, they avail no man any thing, they do not appear, in this tremendous hour. The beggar rises up from his dunghill, and the king from his stately tomb, for the same judgment, and stand together side by side perhaps before the same Judge. None so great as to be allowed to escape this trial, none so mean as to be overlooked in it. None so holy or so dear to God, as to be exempt from judgment, none so unholy as to be condemned without it. “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.” “Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

V. Let us look now at *the process of this judgment*, the manner in which it will be conducted. And herein we may notice three things—the exactness of it, the justice of it, and a wonderful display of grace which will be made in it.

1. *Its exactness.* “The books were opened,” the apostle says. In the prophet Daniel we find the same language. He too represents an immense multitude assembled at Christ’s throne. “Thousand thousands ministered unto him,” he says, “and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;” and then he adds, “The judgment was set, and the books were opened.” Here is doubtless an allusion to earthly tribunals. A strict judge will have the law before him by which the crimi-

nals are to be tried, and the evidence to support the charges against them openly produced. He is not content with acting uprightly, with judging righteous judgment; he must be seen to act uprightly, the judgment he gives must be acknowledged to be righteous. So here—our great Judge needs no books, no records, to guide his decisions. “All things are naked and opened unto him;” and let him give what sentence he will, no one has power to gainsay it or to ask of him, “Why doest thou this?” But this judgment is set for the display, not so much of his sovereignty, as of his equity, and he will judge the sons of men with as much particularity, exactness, may I say care and caution? as though he were a fallible mortal, rather than the unerring, omniscient, supreme God. Heaven and hell, everlasting life and everlasting death, hang on his sentence; men shall see as he gives it, that he has not given it from partiality or caprice, in ignorance or in haste, but equitably, carefully, like one who knows what he is doing and is determined to do right.

“The books were opened”—the book of God’s law; the law of his universe, which every creature is bound by his very existence in his universe to obey.

The book of his gospel—a book superadded in man’s case to the book of the law, and as binding on man when made known to him, as the law itself. We often mistake here, brethren. We regard the gospel as something given us to be received or rejected at our pleasure. If we reject it, we lose, we think, the blessings it offers us, and there, we suppose, the matter ends; but the matter does not end there. The gospel comes to us with a command to us to believe and accept it; it has in our case the character and authority of a law; and when the great judgment comes, we shall be tried by it. The first question may be, “There is the book of God’s universal law; have you obeyed it?” but the next will be, “Here is the book of his gospel; have you accepted that wonderful offer of mercy this book proclaims?” “God shall judge the secrets of men,” says Paul, “by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” “The word that I have spoken,” says Christ himself, “the same shall judge you in the last day.”

And there is the book of God’s remembrance—a book which is represented to us as a register of us all, and of all the actions, words, and thoughts, of us all; a book which an all-seeing God

has ever open before him, and in which with his own hand he is recording every moment, in anticipation of this judgment, how every moment of our lives is passed.

And then there is a book to be opened within us, the book of memory and conscience. This is now more than half closed up. Our sinful fall has weakened our memories, so that the impressions made on our minds by passing events is slight. We can recal comparatively but few of them, and of those few our recollection soon becomes dim and indistinct. Our conscience too is impaired. Sin and sensuality have deadened it. The cares, pleasures, hurry and turmoil, of life nearly smother it. They give it scarcely an opportunity of speaking within us; and when it does speak, we cannot always trust it; its voice is generally feeble and often false. But when the grave is passed and we are before our God in judgment, memory and conscience will wake up within us as from a long sleep. Memory, faithful at last, will discover to us that it has retained thousands of things which it had long seemed to have let go, every thing perhaps with which our minds have been ever conversant; and conscience, faithful at last, will accuse us perhaps, without omission or mistake, for every sin. There are few of us, who have not at intervals been surprised at the power of these two faculties within us; it is an indication of their future power when they are called forth in their full energy before our Judge.

Such will be the exactness of this judgment; "The books will be opened;" opened to be examined, opened to decide the sentence that is to be passed on us. And hence appears

2. *The justice or equity of this judgment*; "The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books." False accusers can do nothing against us now. Friends and flatterers can do nothing for us. They will not be listened to. The books, the true and faithful books only, will be regarded, and by their testimony will our sentence be determined.

The dead were judged out of the books "according to their works." Here all rules of judgment save one, appear to be set aside. Try us by our words, professions, or even some of our desires and feelings, we might, we think, bear the trial of this day, but God says he will not now try us by these. They are before him, he has them in his book; in his own mind he estimates our character in a great measure by them; but this judgment is for the open vindication before his creatures of his

sentence on us, and he must try us by a rule which all his creatures can see and understand. Our works, the things we have actually done—they shall be the tests of our character and the rule of his judgment in this day. Who does not shrink from such a rule and test? But, brethren, we cannot alter it. Our mighty Lord will have his way when he calls the world to his bar, and we must bear to be tried there by whatever standard he pleases. Who then, we ask again, can escape?

3. Observe *the wonderful grace that will be manifested by him in this judgment.*

There is another book mentioned. It is mentioned alone, and appears to have been brought forward alone in this vision after all the other books had been produced. "Another book was opened, which is the book of life."

We must place, in our imaginations, the whole world standing convicted before the Judge. The book of God's law has been opened, declaring the commands we are all bound to obey; and the book of God's remembrance, proving that times out of number we have broken them. These two books so far then are books of condemnation and death to us. But there is the book of the gospel—what says that? "He that believeth shall be saved," it says. Though condemned by the law, he shall not undergo its sentence, he shall be pardoned and delivered. "And that sinful man," says the great Judge on his throne, as one and another of his people appears before him, "that sinful man has believed. Here in my book of remembrance is proof upon proof of it; works of faith and labours of love which my Spirit put it into his heart to perform, and which in my strength he did perform to the glory of my name. Now bring forward that book of life. It is my once secret register of all that are mine. Open it. There stands that man's name written; I with my own hand wrote it there; and though my law condemns him, and record upon record condemns him, yet he believed in me for salvation, and that is enough—I will never condemn him. I will not blot out his name out of that book of life, but I will confess his name, declare and proclaim it here as a name dear to me, before my Father and before his angels."

And thus the equity and the grace of the great Judge shine forth together. His grace is wonderfully displayed and glorified in the salvation of his people. An admiring universe sees

that all whom he saves, are saved, not for their own works or deservings, but altogether by his free mercy through faith in his own precious blood and righteousness. And yet, by making their works the tests and proofs of their faith in his righteousness and blood, he displays and glorifies, along with his grace, his holy justice ; their salvation does not appear an act of his mere sovereignty only, but an act also of his equity and truth. He promised salvation to all who should believe in him ; these men have proved their faith in him by their works ; he is faithful and just therefore in giving them his salvation.

Say not then, brethren, that I have been leading you away from the glorious gospel as I have been endeavouring to explain to you this text. These are the texts, which make a thoughtful man cling to that gospel. They shew us the value of it, how greatly we need it, and how certainly and irrecoverably undone we shall be at the last if we come short of its great salvation. Instead then of saying to you as an inspired apostle perhaps would say were he here, "Seeing then that all these things," these earthly things, "shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" I would rather proclaim to you yet once again, with this solemn scene immediately before us, the free, abounding, superabounding, magnificent grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has done much, brethren, to save you when you stand before him in this judgment. He knew that you must stand before him in it, and he has come down and died in this miserable world for you, that he might not condemn you when you should appear before him. He is keeping you alive now, now, it may be, in your worldly-mindedness, your sins and follies, that you may not come to this judgment without an interest in his death. He is calling on you to seek it ; he tells you that you may have it as freely as the beggar in your streets may open his hand and receive your proffered alms. "Believe and be saved," was his call to you ten, twenty, perhaps twice ten or twenty years ago ; he has not altered his call now though you have all this time trifled with and despised it. "Believe and be saved," is his language to you still. His book of life is within reach of his blessed hand. One look of yours, one prayer, one simple sentence uttered with an honest heart, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," and your name shall be written there ; and once written, nothing shall ever blot it out. He will re-

member you on his great white throne; and when your turn for trial comes, and the other books are opened, he will turn to this; there shall your name be found, and though you may have approached as near destruction as any one ever approached without sinking into it, you shall be saved, saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

SERMON XIII.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE TARES AND THE WHEAT.

ST. MATTHEW XIII. 30 —“ Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

SOME of our Lord's parables relate to individuals only, others to his church chiefly. This is of the latter class. It sets before us,

I. *The mixed condition of his church in our world.* It is a field, it says, in which tares and wheat are growing together commingled and confused. And here is a proof of our Lord's foreknowledge—he saw at this early period what his church would be; and a proof of his holy character. What would an impostor or an enthusiast have said? “The whole world lieth in wickedness, but come into my church—all is purity here; it is a moral paradise in this wilderness.” “But you will find noxious weeds even here,” says Christ: “the righteous and the wicked, the sincere and the hypocrite, the polluted and the clean, are standing here side by side.”

That this is the case now, we well know. That it ever has been the case, is equally certain. We hear indeed of the purity of the primitive church, but it is as ideal, brethren, as

the purity and happiness of the golden age. We open our bibles, we turn to ecclesiastical history, and we see that Christ's church has been from the first, what it is now, a mixed scene, a field of worthless weeds and precious corn; here the corn predominating and here the weeds, but every where both to be found.

And this has been the case too in spite of almost incessant efforts to render it otherwise. "We will not endure a corrupt church," men have said. "We will not mix ourselves up as Christians with the unholy and unbelieving." And they have acted on what they have said—they have separated themselves from this church and that, and founded others; but what has been the result? Disappointment. They have carried away the tares as well as the wheat with them, and after a time they have been constrained to say, "We are little bettered." We call our own a pure church, and pure it is in comparison with many others, but what is it in fact? With our beautiful prayer-book, our scriptural articles, our form of discipline, our fences, as we may call them, to keep out errors and heresies, the ungodly and profane, error and heresy, the ungodly and profane never have been kept out and never will be. All experience says, we might as well build a wall round our field or garden, and say, "Now we shall have no weeds." We may wonder at this, brethren, but we cannot alter it. Such is the Lord's will, and we must be silent.

II. Mark in the parable *the cause of this mixed condition of the church.*

We may say it is natural, and so it is; but our Lord does not say this. He leads us farther than nature, into the unseen spiritual world, to account for it.

The existence of his people here, he traces to himself. He compares them to wheat springing up, not spontaneously, the natural produce of the ground it stands on, but from seed brought and sown there. And this seed, he says, he sowed himself. It is his word, the word of his gospel. This he causes to be preached in the world, preparing here and there the hearts of men to receive it, implanting it in their hearts, rooting it and making it fruitful within them; and there in those places, through the gospel, he has a people rise up, a people of his own, a peculiar people, to love, serve, and glorify him. Hence

his people are said to be "begotten unto him" through the gospel, and to be "born again" of seed, incorruptible seed, which is the word of God.

And this attaches a vast importance to the faithful preaching of the gospel. It is the appointed means whereby Christ generally converts the soul, brings men to himself, makes them his own, gives them a name and a place among his children. "Sermons are nothing, our prayers are every thing," we sometimes hear men say; but let them look at this parable, or the parable preceding it, that of the sower—they must rather say, "Sermons are every thing." The word, the preached gospel of Christ, is represented in both as lying at the root of all real godliness, as the seed of a sinner's religion and of his salvation also. "It hath pleased God," the apostle says, "by the foolishness of preaching"—what? to instruct, comfort, benefit? no—"to save them that believe." He calls the gospel "the word of salvation," and an angel from heaven calls it "the word of life."

The tares too have their existence in the church traced to a spiritual author; "The enemy that sowed them, is the devil."

"The enemy"—Christ's own enemy, the twenty-fifth verse tells us. God declared in paradise that there should be enmity between these two, and here this enmity is in operation. No sooner had Christ begun by his gospel to gather sinners to himself, than Satan came in to mar his blessed work. He sowed good seed in his field, and he might, if he had pleased, have built a wall around it when he had done so, and kept every enemy out; but it was never his intention to keep injurious things out of it. He therefore left the way into it open, and his enemy came in at once and sowed tares. Man, left to himself, would have done much to corrupt the gospel, but Satan would not leave man to himself. He came out of darkness among us with his falsehoods, as soon as Christ had come among us from the light of heaven with his truth; and the consequence is, the church of Christ on the earth has been from the very first a mixed scene; it has had truth and error prevailing in it, false doctrine and true; a Christianity that enlightens, purifies, exalts, and saves the soul, and a pretended Christianity that darkens, degrades, and ruins it; "the glorious gospel of the blessed God," and "another gospel" which God abhors. And just as Christ's truth enters into men's minds and works there through Christ's power, making them "the children of his kingdom," and con-

forming them to his image; so do Satan's falsehoods enter into men's minds, and, working there through his power, they form the character of men after his model, and lead them to do his works. The ungodly are accordingly called here "the children of the wicked one;" they owe their existence in the church to the wicked one, they are the seed of his sowing.

And this bad seed, observe, this enemy is represented as introducing into the church stealthily. "By night, while men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way." We seldom see the origin of spiritual errors and corruptions. They spring up and prevail, but we are scarcely conscious of their existence till they have taken root and begun to cover the land. As true religion in a believer's soul declines imperceptibly and gradually—the man does not fall down at once to where he ultimately sinks, but slides down, "backslides," and this generally without knowing it—so false doctrine insinuates itself into the church imperceptibly and gradually. We can hardly see when or how this and that error first established for itself a place among us. Satan does not shew himself while he is doing his work, and when it is done, he is still invisible. We look around and see the mischief, but we do not see the author of it, nor perhaps think of him.

And here we have an explanation of the difficulty we find in putting down error. We bring the truth of Christ to bear against it, and down, we say, it must come; but there it stands in defiance of Christ's truth, and often too in defiance of common sense; and this confounds us. We feel as a man would feel, who has struck a cobweb with a powerful weapon, rending it, as he supposes, to atoms, and yet sees the cobweb entire and unhurt before him. Now that cobweb, this parable says, is not of earthly origin; it is not to be destroyed by an earthly arm. Satan is the father of that flimsy error; he is upholding it with all his craft and power; and that accounts for the difficulty we find in beating it down. We are not fighting against flesh and blood in contending with error; or if so, with the word of God for our weapon, the contest would soon be over; we are fighting against the principalities and powers of an unseen world, and nothing short of the interposition of the living God, be our weapons what they may, can give us a victory over them or destroy their works.

III. Let us now look at *the conduct of Christ's servants with respect to this mixture in his church.*

1. *They notice it.*

The tares in this field are represented as after a time shewing themselves; "When the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also," appeared as tares. And the servants of the householder see and observe them; for we find them coming immediately to their master and telling him of them. So Christ's servants on the earth cannot be blind to the mixture, the corruptions and evils, that exist in his church on the earth. "All is well," others say. Whether truth or error abounds, they hardly know. Whether men live as the gospel commands them to live, or after the course of this evil world, they do not care. The state of Christ's church is nothing to them. They feel as a man feels when he passes by a stranger's field—occupied with his own concerns, he never thinks of noticing what state it is in, whether weeds are covering it or corn. But Christ's servants feel as though that field belonged to one they love; as though it were their Master's, or rather their Father's field. They long to see it covered with corn ripening for his garner; and when weeds overrun it, they must see them, they cannot help seeing them, and wishing them away. For mark—

2. *These servants wish to alter this state of things, to put an end to this mixture.*

"An enemy hath done this," has sowed these tares, their Master says. "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" they immediately ask. An every day question, put by many of Christ's servants to their Lord. We cannot enter into his plans. We see but a little way before us, while he sees "the end from the beginning." We consequently want to alter his plans; to make every thing, as we say, go right in his church; to pluck up all that we think opposed to his honour and glory. Only let us weed the field, we think, and what a beautiful field it would soon become! "But no," God says to us; "you must stand aside. This is not your work. You are not equal to it. In gathering up those tares, you would be very likely to root up also the wheat with them."

Observe, it is for the wheat's sake that the tares are to be let alone. We often want for the wheat's sake to pull them up. "There is that hypocrite," we say, "that worker of iniquity."

He comes in and out among Christ's people as one of themselves, no man suspecting him. What harm he will do among them! We must unmask him; we must shew him to our neighbours and fellow-Christians as he is." But "Be still," God says to us here; "leave that man to me. Fret not thyself because of evil doers. I can guard my people from all the mischief they can ever do them, or I can overrule it all to my own glory." Besides we are not always sure that men are the hypocritical and iniquitous men we deem them. We see but a part of their conduct, and we often judge of them as though we saw the whole. What should we have done with Peter when with curses and oaths he was denying his Master? or with David before the Lord sent Nathan to call him to repentance? We should have plucked them both up; and so we should thousands who are as dear to Christ as the throne he sits on. "Leave those tares alone," he therefore says to us, "lest while ye gather them up, ye root up also the wheat with them."

IV. We may now notice one thing more—the *end which shall at last be put to this mixture in the church.*

It is not to go on for ever. "Let both grow together until the harvest," Christ says—"the harvest," a definite time, a time even now in Christ's mind, and to which all he is doing in our world has a reference.

"The harvest"—it is the time when the husbandman's care and labour are over. He has nothing now to do but to gather in for himself the fruits of them. And there is a day coming when the work of the blessed Jesus, the great spiritual husbandman, will all be over. The last sinner he died to redeem, will have been redeemed; the last soul he will ever save, will have been saved; the last pardon he will ever give, given; his last act of grace done; the last design of God's providence in our world accomplished; the world's last day, last hour, last moment, come. Then will he say, "The harvest of the earth is ripe. Now sever me the wicked from among the just. Now gather out of my kingdom all things that offend. Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn."

"Gather ye together the tares"—take them out from among the wheat, separate them; and when this is done, bring them together, collect them; and then bind them together, let them

never mix with the wheat or be separated one from another again. An affecting command, brethren; to a feeling heart, a very solemn one. Here we are, neighbours and friends, parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, all forming one assembly. We are all mixed up day by day one with another. But there is an hour coming, when we shall be rent asunder. All in this congregation will be divided into two companies, one never to mingle with, never to see, the other more. And what is to be the rule of separation? Relationship? our love and affection one for another? our desire to go together and rejoice or suffer together? No. There goes the wife and there the husband; there the parent and there the child; there the brother and there the sister; they who are now dwelling in the same house and sharing perhaps the same bed, are separated as far asunder as heaven and hell. If we have never known the cleansing of a Saviour's blood, never sought and found his mercy, no matter how our souls may now love some of those who are his people and cling to them, there is a day coming when we shall be torn from them, and bound together with the filthy and the vile. O may the living God put David's prayer into many a heart here—"Gather not my soul with sinners." Cut not me off from the holy and the good. An eternity far from all the excellent of the earth—an eternity with all the vile of the earth. O merciful God, save my poor soul from this!

"But gather the wheat into my barn." "The wheat"—here comes out the love of Christ for his people, or rather the value he sets on them. He does not look on them merely as a father looks on a recovered child, as so many objects of his fond affection; he looks on them as a husbandman looks on the corn he has reaped; he regards them as valuable to him and precious, enriching him, a blessed recompence for his past labours and toils. You may say, How can so lofty a Being regard creatures such as we are in a light like this? Brethren, if you are really his redeemed creatures, the purchase of his blood, you know not in what light the Lord Jesus regards you. He is precious to your souls, but you are inconceivably more precious to his. You are to be for ever his reward and crown in the kingdom of his glory.

"Gather ye the wheat into *my barn*." There is a place prepared for the reception of the wheat; it is standing prepared for it while the wheat is growing. And, if we are Christ's, there is

a place prepared for us, brethren, while amid the storms and vicissitudes of life, we are preparing for that. The love of Christ anticipates our going to him. Like a father who is looking for the coming home of his child from some distant land, and does not say, "I will get a room ready for him when he comes," but gets it ready beforehand, and long beforehand, and often thinks of the joy he shall feel when he leads him into it, so does Christ get ready the habitation of his people in his kingdom, and longs for the time when he shall behold them in it.

And what a day will that be when he places them all in it, the day when this harvest comes! We are thanking God now year by year for our earthly harvests. A whole nation is sometimes sending up together its grateful praise to him for this welcome blessing. But then a whole universe shall praise him, and praise him as it has never praised him yet. "A new song" shall then burst forth, in which "every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea," every living being, shall join. There shall be joy in heaven, such as even heaven itself has never before known; and he that will rejoice the most, shall be this great Lord of the harvest, the Son of Man. We shall be happy, but as for his happiness, it will be, compared with ours, as an ocean to a cistern. We, he says at the end of this parable, "shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father;" but how will he shine? We must be in the kingdom of our Father and behold him in it, before we can tell.

And now comes the question, shall we ever behold him in it? What are we, brethren, at this moment? We are standing in the field, we are in Christ's church; are we worthless tares in it or some of the precious wheat? We are most certainly one or the other. Christ himself is looking on us at this moment as one or the other. O that every one of us would look into his heart and say, Which am I? This parable tells us plainly that, however diversified in many respects our characters and conditions may be, in the Lord's sight there are but two classes of men among us; and it tells us as plainly that there are two different ends only awaiting us all. There is the burning and the barn, the furnace of fire and the kingdom of the Father. It is a solemn thought that there is nothing for us between these two, no intermediate condition. We must be either lost or saved in eternity; we must spend that eternity in heaven or in hell.

SERMON XIV.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

CHRIST A DESTROYER.

1 JOHN III. 8.—“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

WE have again the incarnate Saviour before us, brethren, but not now as a Saviour; the text presents him to us in a character directly the reverse of this. It speaks of him as a destroyer.

We may divide it into three parts—the works of the devil, the manifestation of the Son of God to destroy these works, and his destruction of them.

I. *The works of the devil.*

What these may be in the unseen world, we know not; we find enough of them here in our world to astonish us. It astonishes us indeed, when we reflect on it, that a holy and omnipotent God should allow such a being to work at all; but when we think of the number and magnitude of his works even as far as we can discover them, our astonishment takes a new direction: we wonder and wonder again, that any created being, however powerful, can be the author of mischief so great.

Moral evil, *sin*, is one of these works. It is this which the apostle has more especially in his mind here, and which we may regard as the foundation of all the rest. This, we know, was introduced into our world by Satan. He came and brought it into paradise, planted it there, or rather ingrafted it there into our before holy nature, and has ever since been watching over, fostering, and spreading it.

What we call natural evil, *suffering*, is another of his works. It grows out of sin. By a law of God's government never broken, it follows sin wherever it goes, and abounds wherever sin abounds. The mass of it in our world, could we see it all,

would do more than distress, it would confound us. Think only of that one city which is the metropolis of our own land. Let any one lay bare to us the misery both of body and mind, that at this moment exists there; let the eye and the heart take in at a glance the whole of it; we should never forget the sight. And yet what is crowded London, with its scenes upon scenes of poverty, sickness, soul-withering care, despondency of heart, and wretchedness—what is it to a crowded and groaning world?

And then comes *discord*, another work of Satan. Man and his God were walking together at first in a blessed amity. Satan came in and severed between them. Man fled at once from his God, and though his God has been following him ever since with offers of reconciliation, just as a kind father would follow an erring child, man has ever since been alienated in his affections from him, quarrelling with all he is and does, with his character, his law, his gospel, his providence, with all his ways.

And think of the contentions which have ever been going on between man and man in nations, societies, churches, and even families—Satan has fostered them all; nay, given rise to them all. We are sometimes ready to say, “O what a scene of turmoil and strife is the neighbourhood we are living in! We will go away from it that we may escape its contentions.” But go elsewhere, and after a little you find out that you are among contentions again. It is not this place or that, which is in fault; it is human nature. Satan has introduced the elements of strife deep into our nature, and we are not safe any where on this side heaven for a single hour from some contentious outbreak.

And then there is *the deception* which prevails in our world. I allude not to the deceptions men are every where practising on their fellow-men. These are distressing enough; but far more distressing is the spiritual delusion the world is under. We must trace this also to Satan. He is called in scripture “the father,” that is, the author “of lies,” of all lies, but more especially of all spiritual lies. Well knowing that he cannot keep religion altogether out of the world, he deludes men with false religions. Thus he beguiled the heathen, and beguiles them still, leading them to set up idols and then persuading them they are gods. And thus he beguiled the Jews, getting them to look on their temple and its ceremonies as the all in all of their religion, and so turning their religion, their divine, heaven-descended religion, into a vain superstition. And look

into Christian lands. We mourn over what Satan has done here in our own land, the tares he has sown in this richly cultivated, favoured field of the Lord; the strange errors, and heresies, and follies, he has caused from time to time to spring up among us; but go into popish lands, and especially into those lands where popery is not forced to crouch before public opinion as it is here, but feels itself at liberty, and can stretch itself out fearlessly in all its gigantic deformity; traverse Italy, for instance—from one end to the other of it, the heart sickens every where at the work and triumph of the great deceiver. There indeed does he appear in what the scripture so strongly calls “all deceivableness of unrighteousness;” giving men under the holy name of Christianity—what? something so childish, so degrading, and at the same time so heathenish, mischievous, and polluting, that were not the fact before us, we should say no civilized nation on the face of the earth could in any way be brought to receive or tolerate it. It seems indeed as though Satan exulted there in his power to deceive, and was determined to shew there how far he can carry it. “Your Bible calls me,” he seems to say, “the ruler of the darkness of this world. I am so, and here is my throne.” O brethren, if we Englishmen had no other national mercy to thank God for, we have this to thank him for, and we could scarcely have a greater, that as yet we are a protestant people. O let us all pray with one heart and soul, that we may ever be kept such!

Another work of Satan is *the obscurity he has thrown here over Jehovah's glory*. He seems to have baffled God in all his purposes and intentions as to our world; to have brought to nothing all the designs of his goodness towards it when he created it. Those abundant outpourings of his love which were descending here, Satan has stopped in their way to us. “I will form there a garden of delights,” the Lord seems to have said, “where I and my creature man will walk together in mutual fellowship and joy.” “I have broken down its hedges,” says Satan. “The garden is gone. I have made it a wild desert. Thorns and briars are in it. Man shall tear himself and bleed as he walks therein, and as for God, he shall come there no more.”

And one thing more must be added—*death*. This crowns the work of Satan. It appears to complete his triumph among us, leaving him, as far as we are concerned, nothing more to do or to desire.

These then are the works of the devil. Some of them are not always called his works. They are sometimes said to be "works of darkness," for they are congenial with darkness and are often done in it; and sometimes "the works of the flesh," because our flesh or corrupt nature is of itself inclined to them and loves them. And then at other times they are spoken of as our works, because we are parties consenting to them, instruments in carrying them on. But here the Holy Spirit looks on these works in their origin. The devil is the planner and instigator of them all. God sees him in them all; and passing by us, and our evil nature, and the darkness that covers them, he lets him know that he sees him. He fixes them on their author. "They are the devil's works," he says, "and as such I will deal with them."

II. Let us go on then to consider *the manifestation of the Son of God to destroy them.*

If these works are ever to be destroyed, there was a necessity for a divine interposition. None but God could destroy these works. We cannot perhaps account for it, but it seems as though every created being were far more powerful to do evil than good. Satan then, working with all his mighty strength, has wrought more evil in the universe, than any other creature in it, or all other creatures in it, can undo. The Lord himself therefore comes forth, in the person of his everlasting Son, to beat down and destroy. And he did this not secretly, in his unseen spiritual nature, but openly, visibly; "The Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." He existed before, but it was "in light that no one could approach unto;" no one saw him; he comes forth now out of that unapproachable light, reveals himself, takes on him a form in which he can be seen; and there he is manifested in our world, gazed on at Bethlehem by angels and by men.

And just notice, brethren, how a single word like this sometimes establishes in a moment our Lord's divinity. He must have existed before, or he could not be said to have been manifested on the earth—there is an answer for the man who says that he never lived till he lived at Bethlehem. And he existed before as God, for here is the very phrase applied to him, that is applied elsewhere to God himself and in the same sense. "God was manifest in the flesh," says the Spirit by

St. Paul; "The Son of God was manifested," says the same Spirit here by St. John—there is an answer for another man who says that the Lord Jesus, though he might have existed before, existed only as a lofty angel.

And this manifestation attaches great importance to the destruction of Satan and his works. The same Son of God built the earth and the heavens, but he never moved from his place as he built them. He did not shew himself. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." But now, when this work of destruction is to be performed, he does leave his place; he comes forth into sight, as though he were going to perform a work of greater magnitude, or else a work he deems more honourable and which he wishes to be seen performing.

Its importance may be inferred also from another circumstance—this destruction is mentioned here as the great end of our Lord's coming, and emphatically so mentioned; "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." In the fifth verse, the apostle says, "he was manifested to take away our sins;" in the next chapter, he tells us that the Father sent him "that we might live through him;" and again, that "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Here he says he was sent "that he might destroy the works of the devil;" and not this as some trifling, incidental thing that he might accomplish while accomplishing the other—this is said to be the one primary, main end of his coming. And what does this teach us? It teaches us that there is no remission of sins for us, no life through Christ for us, no salvation for a guilty world or any one in it, unless the works of the devil are destroyed. One of these ends of Christ's appearing is as important as the other, is necessary in order to the other. Even the omnipotent Son of God cannot be a Saviour unless he is at the same time a Destroyer. The works of Satan must be demolished, or God's great work of mercy, the work on which from eternity he has set his heart, the salvation of his church, cannot be accomplished.

III. We come now to *the destruction of these works.*

Here is much to surprise us. The Lord Jesus effects their destruction in a character and by means altogether wonderful.

He effects it in a wonderful character. Had we been told

that the Son of the Highest was about to manifest himself in our world as a Destroyer, we should have expected him to appear among us in his glorious majesty, withering Satan, as he will do hereafter, by "the brightness of his coming," and at once sweeping him and his works away from the earth. But the Lord is wiser than we. This would have been a display of the divine power only. It would have been like the act of some mighty king whom enemies are insulting, and who having no other means of restraining them, is obliged to arouse himself and put forth his strength in order to subdue them. The Lord would not thus honour Satan. He lays aside his majesty when he comes forth to this work of destruction. He achieves it, not in the greatness of his strength, but divested in appearance of all his strength, in seeming weakness, in our ruined nature, as a feeble man. Satan and his works shall be overthrown by one of those very creatures whom Satan has long triumphed over, and is proudly trampling under his vile feet.

And if the character was wonderful in which our Lord achieved this work, the means whereby he achieved it, were still more so. "Through death," we are told, "he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Here is mystery indeed. In part however this mystery is unfolded, and enough unfolded to make us admire the riches of wisdom and glory it contains. To understand it, we must remember that sin is Satan's great work. It is like a wide and deep foundation on which all his other works rest. Now Christ, by dying as a propitiation for sin, removes this foundation, takes it away, and the works which Satan had raised on it, are in consequence loosened, as the original word in the text imports; they totter to their fall. Not that his death drives sin at once out of the world. It does not at once repair all the mischief the devil has wrought here, nor even prevent him from going on to work more; but by satisfying the violated law and justice of Jehovah, it opens a way by which, consistently with his glorious perfections, he is at liberty to pardon sin, and having pardoned it, to deliver, sanctify, and bless, the sinner. And it is not enough to say it enables Jehovah to do this in perfect harmony with his glorious character, he displays the glory of his character as he does it, and more of the glory of it than he had ever unveiled before, so that he not only clears off from his moral government the seeming stain and dishonour which

Satan had cast on it, he invests it with a brighter honour and a holier grandeur. The great King of heaven and earth shines forth in a more glorious majesty by the destruction of Satan and his works through the manifestation of his Son, than he would ever have appeared in, had Satan never wrought.

It is easy to follow this on. Sin taken away and the glory of God vindicated by the incarnation and death of Christ, the riches of the divine goodness can now be poured out freely and abundantly on our guilty world. All the fulness of the Godhead is placed in Christ's hands for our salvation and happiness, and consequently for the overthrow of Satan's power and doings among us. The Lord Jesus can now do whatsoever he will. He is seated on the throne of the eternal majesty, and just as far as his wisdom dictates, he can control Satan, he is controlling him, destroying his works, and liberating his captives from his power. Moral evil, sin; natural evil, suffering; discord; death—he is able to destroy them all. And as for the deceptions and delusions of Satan, they are no more to the Spirit of Christ, no more to the power of Christ's gospel and truth in that Spirit's hands, than the shades of night are to the rising sun.

This work of destruction is begun. The process is now going on. We may ask why it goes on so slowly, why it has not long ago been complete, why Satan is allowed still to work and to work so extensively and fearfully? we may ask these questions and others like them till our minds ache, but we cannot answer them. And the humble Christian is not anxious to answer them. He can trust his God to bring about his own purposes in his own time and way. His anxiety, with a text like this before him, takes another direction. "I want," he says, "to have all the works of the devil destroyed in my own soul." It is not simply in the world, brethren, it is in our hearts and in our houses, that these works are carried on. God calls our sins by this name. He could not call them by a worse. And that is the reason why many of us do not like to have them called by this name. Its sound is offensive to us. We would be thought to have nothing to do with the devil, and he nothing to do with us. But it is a solemn fact, and a fact as clearly stated in holy scripture as words can state it, that while we are living in sin, we are living under Satan's influence, are acted on and governed by him, and are doing, as really as

though we had formed a compact with him, his will and works. Look at the verse before us. "He that committeth sin," says John, the mild affectionate John, not this or that harsh preacher, "he that committeth sin, is of the devil;" and how of the devil? as a servant is of his master? no; worse—look at the tenth verse—as a child is of a father; not only obeying his orders, but partaking of his spirit and nature.

O what a dark character, brethren, is thus put, I will not say upon us, but upon some of our practices! We call them perhaps frailties of the flesh, infirmities of our nature, slips and errors into which we are unavoidably led by our physical and moral constitution and the situations in which we are placed; but God says to us in this text, "Dare not to talk thus. I see the hand of the vilest of all vile beings in every sin you commit; and in pity to you, I want you also to see it. Your sins are loathsome and detestable to me, and to get you to loathe and detest them, I tell you whence they come; I put this term of abomination on them, they are the works of the devil. I want you to judge of sin, as I judge of it; to see the great enemy of your souls in it, as I see him. I want you to be holy, and happy, and free: and that you may be so, I tell you and tell you again, that you are now in a most unholy, miserable bondage; that you are doing and doing without knowing it, the very works I clothed my Son in mortal flesh to destroy." He must destroy our sins, brethren. It is his office and commission in some way to destroy them. If you will not let them go from you, he will in the end destroy you with them. You are like men cleaving to a doomed ship; it is going down, and unless you let go your hold, you will go down with it. Or rather you are like men wearing garments that are to be consumed; tear them off, or you will be consumed with them.

But there are some among us, who have long ago been taught all this; men in whom this work of destruction has long since been begun. It is easy perhaps to tell what some of your feelings are as you read this text—fresh feelings of loathing at the remembrance of your past sins, and, it may be, at the consciousness of your present corruptions; fresh humiliation before God on account of them; new resolutions to look more to Christ, the great Destroyer, for a complete freedom from them. And there is another feeling that ought to have a place in you—a feeling of praise and thanksgiving to your in-

carnate Lord. Is the destruction of sin within you identified in your minds with the salvation and happiness of your souls? If you are Christian men, it really is so. Then glorify the Lord Jesus Christ as the great Destroyer. Repose in him as the great Destroyer. Let your own hated sins grieve you if they will; they ought to grieve you; but let them not affright you. Let the abominations that are in the world, pain but not shake you. Look again at the language of this text; "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." Did he really purpose this? Has he really come into our world and shewn himself here to accomplish this? entered on this work, and let men and angels see that he has entered on it? Then it will be accomplished. He who has begun, will finish it. Wait a few more short years—there will not be a fragment or trace of Satan's works left within you. And wait a few centuries—there will not be a trace of Satan left in the wide universe, except in his own wretched hell. The mighty Destroyer's work shall be complete, and we and his wondering church shall adore him for its completeness, shall be rejoicing before him in its perfection and glory.

SERMON XV.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE ANGELS REJOICING AT THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

JOB XXXVIII. 7.—"The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."

HERE is something that took place when our world was created, but not in our world. Heaven was the scene of it; and it is told us in order to carry up our thoughts to heaven, and make us better acquainted with it.

There are three points in the text to be attended to—first, those of whom it speaks; then, what they are said to have done; and then, the occasion of their doing it.

I. We must look at *those spoken of in it*.

They are called “the morning stars” and “the sons of God;” and there is no doubt but that the same beings are meant by both these expressions. The morning stars are not literally any of the shining orbs that adorn the firmament, but those who are immediately afterwards designated “the sons of God.” And these, we conclude, must be the angels, for we know of no other creatures in existence at this time. We must ask then why these heavenly beings are called by the two names here applied to them.

With *a star* we connect the ideas of brightness and beauty; and with *a morning star*, peculiar brightness and peculiar beauty. When therefore any one is said to be a star, we understand at once that he shines out above others, that there is something excellent and eminent in him; and if he were called a morning star, we should understand that this eminence above others is visible and great. “I am the bright and morning star,” says our Lord of himself, and he means, we say immediately, that he is transcendently fair and glorious. And so here. “My angels,” God says to us, “are morning stars. There is nothing in your world bright enough for me to compare them with. Look upwards. Behold those worlds of light, that are glittering far above you. My angels are like them; and like the brightest of them, that beautiful morning star.”

What a glorious world then must heaven be! It is inhabited by creatures that not only receive light from it, but reflect that light around them wherever they go. Well may it be called “the inheritance of the saints in light.” It is a world of stars and suns, and millions of them, and each one of them brighter than earthly eye can bear to gaze on. Think of John. Twice over in his mysterious vision he saw one of these splendid beings, and fell down, he says, to worship him. So glorious was he, that he felt as though he saw his God.

And then the angels are called also *the sons of God*. They are not his sons as the everlasting Saviour is. They are called his sons by mere grace and favour. The Lord, having first

given life to them, and then loving them as his children and treating them as his children, says of them at last, "They are my children, my sons." The name shews the abundance of his love towards them, and the greatness of his condescension in his intercourse with them. It gives us also an idea of heaven as of a place of holy affection and endearment. It represents the great God as manifesting the tenderness of his love there. He is a father in heaven, it says, with a father's feelings, and speaking a father's language. Heaven is his family, and all that are in it, are in it as his children. And exactly thus our Lord describes it. He speaks of it as a child would speak of his paternal home. "It is my Father's house," he says. And St. Paul too had the same idea of it. He tells us of "the whole family in heaven."

We may say then here, what a happy, as well as glorious world is heaven! Its brightness will not confound us, no, not the brightness of him who is the great light and glory of it. We shall feel at home in it, for at last we shall really be at home. "Now are we the sons of God," but now we are sons far away from our father's house, strangers in a strange land, often doubtful whether we belong to God or not: in heaven we shall be where our Father is; we shall see him, and dwell with him, and be acknowledged by him as his. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

II. Let us come now to *what these angels are said to have done*. They "sang;" they all "sang together;" they "shouted for joy."

They sang. Now singing, when natural, is the language always of feeling, and generally of happy feeling. In this case it certainly is so. It intimates that these angels were happy and very happy; and more—that in heaven happiness is expressed as well as felt. It is an humble world, the humblest in the universe; reverence and godly fear reign every where in it and every moment; but it is not an awe-struck world. They who feel in it, give utterance to their feelings. Their joy comes out. They indulge and express it, and know that they may do so. The Lord is well pleased with their joy. There is liberty in heaven, glorious liberty, the liberty of the children of God.

They sang together. Here comes in the idea of union and harmony, a oneness of feeling and joy, among these morning stars. Every one of them sang, and sang at the same time, and for the same reason, and the same song. There was one heart only in heaven, and one voice.

And we may trace this same thing in other parts of scripture. An angel comes down rejoicing to the shepherds at Bethlehem. "Behold," he says, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, for unto you is born this day a Saviour;" and what follows? He is immediately joined by the whole army of heaven; "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God." And again in Rev. xix. "I heard," says the apostle, "the voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia;" and then others are described as taking up the song, and crying, "Alleluia;" and at last comes in the full chorus of heaven; all there both small and great are uniting in this one strain, "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

And God loves this oneness of feeling. He loves it in heaven, and he loves it on earth. It is one among the many blessings he promises his people; "I will give them one heart and one way." He puts honour on it when his people pray. "If two of you," says Christ, "shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father." And he delights in it when his people praise. Hence Paul prays for his Roman converts, that they may "with one mind and one mouth glorify God."

Do I then, let each one of us ask, possess this fellowship, this sympathy, with the people of God? Does the voice of praise from others find its way to my heart? Do I love to hear it? Does it generally warm my heart? If I were now in heaven, do I feel that I must break out into the song of heaven? that if I heard angels singing there, I must sing too? that I could not be silent there, if I would? If it is thus with me, then let me bless my God that I have at least one mark on me of those that are his. But if it is not thus with me; if while others praise, I am silent and am content to be so; if neither my tongue nor my heart moves; what must I think then? I must think this, that I must be an altered man before I can be meet for a world of praise.

Hitherto we have seen two things in the joy of these angels. It is a lively joy, for they sing; it is a social, wide-spread joy,

for they all sing together. And now comes something else—it is an overflowing joy; they cannot restrain it; the song becomes a shout and a universal one.

All the sons of God shouted for joy. And this expression not only gives us a delightful idea of the happiness of heaven; if we think of it a little, we shall see that it invests it with a sublimity and majesty. When the prophet Isaiah wishes to describe the joy of the church at the advent of the Messiah, he compares it to the joy of husbandmen at the end of an abundant harvest, or the rejoicing of an army in the triumph of victory: “They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.” But when the rejoicing of heaven is to be described in scripture, far loftier figures are employed, the loftiest that can be found. There is the sound of the mighty ocean breaking on a steep and rugged shore. If you have heard that, brethren, and heard it alone, in the stillness of solitude or of night, you have received from it a deep impression of grandeur. And there is the rolling of thunder—who can hear that and not feel that that also has a mighty power to affect and elevate? We know of no sounds in nature so sublime as these two. These therefore the Holy Spirit takes, and to them he compares the praise of heaven. Twice over in the Revelation of St. John, he says it is as the “voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings.” And what makes this song so loud and noble? It is the song of so many happy beings, and their happiness is so great and unrestrained. Countless thousands are singing it, and among them all, there is not one who is not impelled by unutterable blessedness to sing it. It is the outpouring of a happiness that is more than full; it is the overflowing of an ocean of joy. “I heard,” says the wondering John, “the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

III. And now for our third point—*the occasion of all this rejoicing in heaven at this time.*

We see, by examining the chapter, that it was called forth by the creation of our world. The Lord speaks out of a whirlwind to Job, and in order to make Job feel his nothingness in compa-

rison with him, he asks him where he was when he laid the foundations of the earth. Then follows a description of the earth's creation, and that of a particular character—the Lord speaks of it as a building, and of himself as its mighty architect. We read of his laying the measures of it, stretching the line on it, fastening the foundations, laying the corner-stone.

Now it was usual among eastern nations, as it is indeed amongst us, to have a kind of rejoicing at the commencement, and also at the completion, of any large building. Thus we are told in the book of Ezra, that when the second temple at Jerusalem was begun after the captivity, there were songs among the assembled people and holy rejoicings; and you remember what Zechariah said should take place at the completion of it; "They shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings," that is with acclamations of praise and joy. And thus God, the great Builder of the earth, says, "There was a glorious triumph here in heaven when I built your world. My angels were looking on and praising. The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Our object now then must be, to discover why the creation of our world occasioned so much joy in the heaven above us. And to this end, we must suppose ourselves suddenly brought before a noble building from which the scaffolding has just been cleared away. Our first sensations of pleasure in a situation like this, would have their origin perhaps in the mere beauty and magnificence of the structure. And so doubtless it was in this case.

1. The joy of these angels was *a joy of admiration*. They sang together, because they were struck together with the beauty of our world.

It is a beautiful world. We cannot look on some of its scenes without feeling it to be such. But then we must remember that we see it in a marred and disfigured state, and we see only a small part of it at one time, and of that small part we see very little; at least, we see it very superficially and imperfectly; ten thousand beauties lie hidden in it from our view. But these angels had our world in all its first freshness and glory before them, ere sin had blighted it, or man tarnished it, or insulted justice devastated it; when God himself delighted in it and pronounced it good. They saw it probably all at once, or a large portion of it at once, and with their powerful vision, they penetrated at once into all its glories. And no wonder that

songs were heard among them. The sight of so much beauty bursting suddenly on them, must have filled them to the full with joy and wonder.

But suppose yourselves interested in the architect of the building we are imagining. After a little, you would feel pleasure in looking at it on another account—you would connect it with your friend who built it; you would see in it traces of his skill, and be delighted to see them; and you would think also with pleasure of the honour it would bring to him. So again here.

2. The song of these morning stars was *a song of praise*. The creation of our world filled them with joy, because our world discovered to them in every part of it the perfections of their God. You may say "They had seen these perfections manifested before in their own glorious heaven, in myriads perhaps of other worlds." I answer, Yes, but every fresh putting forth of the divine power has doubtless in it some new exhibition and laying open of the divine glory. Our world probably unfolded this glory to the angels in a manner that was new to them and surprising. It made them better acquainted with Jehovah's character; or if not so, it produced a new impression in their minds of the glory of that character, and thus led them anew to adore and praise.

Conceive of the scene they witnessed at this time, or try to conceive of it. There is a blank in the universe. In one moment they behold our globe start into being. God speaks, and they see it done; he commands and they behold it stand fast. Without materials, without instruments, without assistance, without effort, he creates in their sight this huge earth; and that of itself must have thrilled them. They had probably never seen an act of creation before, or any thing which so manifested the divine omnipotence. And then as this new-created world began to assume form and order; as light came pouring over it, and its various beauties burst one after another into existence and sight; as the grandeur of its plan unfolded itself, and the benevolence of its design, and the goodness and care that were every where at work in furnishing and adorning it; as every spot in it, and all about it, earth, air, and sea, began to be peopled, and every where with happy and joyous creatures—the hearts of the angels must have glowed with rapture. "See there," they must have said one to another, "what the

Lord our God has done. See there his power, and goodness, and greatness." And then the heavens must have rung anew with their acclamations of praise.

To shew forth the glory of God is the creature's duty, his one great duty; to discover God's glory, to behold and contemplate it, is the creature's main happiness: there is not among men or angels a higher joy. Do any of you wonder that the angels rejoiced as they saw God glorifying himself in the creation of the world? One little flower, a leaf, a blade of grass, can rejoice the godly man, when he looks on it and says, "This is the workmanship of my God. I can see in it his power and goodness."

And now we are come to the end of this text; and what shall we say at the end of it? There is one thought that must surely pass through every serious mind—I have been hearing of a happy heaven and of rejoicing angels; shall I ever be in that heaven and rejoice with those angels? They are singing now. I cannot hear them any more than I can hear the rolling of the ocean far away from me, but that ocean, I know, is rolling on, and those angels are really singing; shall I ever hear them? How will it be with me when I die? shall I spend eternity where they are, in joy and praise, or far away from them with very different angels, in wailing and misery?

And this text which suggests this enquiry, suggests also an answer to it. Does the joy of these angels seem to you a reasonable and natural joy? As you have heard of it to-day, have you felt that had you been amongst them at this time, you could have sung with them? Do you delight in the work of adoration and praise? Would it be heaven to you to be in a world where you should see God, and be every moment contemplating his glory? If you say you scarcely know what these things mean, that in your present state, they certainly would not make you happy; then be assured that you are not in the way to the heaven you have been hearing of, that if you were to die to-day, or die at any time in your present state, you would not go there. A man who is really journeying to that blessed world, God is making meet for that blessed world; he is giving him in the way to it a taste for its employments and happiness. Such a man can understand God when he tells him in his word of heaven's joys. But you cannot understand him; these things are all

strange to you. And does not this say to you plainly enough, you must become new creatures before you can see God? Does not the Lord Jesus appear in it to take up his own words, "Marvel not that I said, Ye must be born again?" You have earthly, unconverted souls, and because unconverted souls, wretched and lost souls. There is no heaven for you in such a state; there is not in the wide universe such a thing for you as happiness. O pray then for a new heart and a new spirit. You have heard of the Holy Ghost. Implore his help. You need him for your salvation, as much as you need the blessed Jesus himself. You acknowledge yourselves guilty sinners, but this is not the worst part of your condition—you are "dead in trespasses and sins." Your spiritual life is gone. Renewing grace is as necessary for you as atoning blood or pardoning mercy. You will perish for ever without it. And it is to be had as freely and had as readily. Again the Lord is set before you as a Father, and a gracious one. "If ye," says Christ, "being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" You may go to this heavenly Father, and go to him now, this very day, this very hour, and as surely obtain from him this life-giving Spirit, as a starving child might obtain from you food and bread.

And let the people of God among us learn to think more of their heavenly home. We see here the angels bringing new joy to themselves from the contemplation of our world. Should not we try to bring some joy into our hearts from the contemplation of their world? We know indeed little about heaven, but one reason is, we are content to know little; we do not stretch our minds to enter into what the holy scripture tells us of heaven. Many glimpses of its glory are to be discovered there: let us look for them, as the mariner scans the distant horizon for the dawning of the morning or for the wished for land. They will reveal to us more than we could at first believe. It is amazing what an insight they will sometimes give the soul into its unseen home. They are like a ray from the mid-day sun penetrating a fissure in a dark room—the room is still dark, but that one ray serves to shew what a bright sunshine there is without. And yet a little, and we shall be in that sunshine. The songs we have been reading of, the shout that burst forth when the world was framed, we shall not hear; but we shall hear more joyful

songs and louder shouts, and from these very angels. O what a scene will that be when the work of redemption shall be finished, and the new heavens and the new earth shall come forth into being! What an amazing song will be raised then, and what a shout of joy! May you hear it, brethren! May you join in it! May all the blessedness of the angels, yea, may the joy of the Lord himself, be yours!

SERMON XVI.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE FAITH OF NOAH.

HEBREWS XI. 7.—“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.”

WHICH of us has not sometimes wondered at the importance attached in holy scripture to faith? A thoughtful perusal of this chapter dissipates all such wonder. It has done so much and suffered so much, and done and suffered it so triumphantly, that simple as faith is in itself, we see it to be, like some simple things in nature, an instrument of almost boundless power in the hand of an all-powerful God.

It is Noah's faith to which I would now call your attention; and to bring this clearly before us, let us consider, first, the situation of Noah at this time; secondly, his conduct in it; thirdly, the principle from which this conduct proceeded—faith; and fourthly, the feeling through which this principle wrought—fear.

I. One glance at his *situation* must bring before us our own.

Here is, first, *an overwhelming destruction threatened to the whole world*. It was not to be confined to any person or any place. With the exception of one family, every person every

where was to be involved in it. "Behold, I, even I," says God, "do bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh wherein is the breath of life from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth, shall die." And where, brethren, are you and I now standing? We almost forget it, but we are breathing the air of a threatened world, yea, a condemned world. The wrath of God is denounced against it, and will as surely consume, as his power created it. And it is not simply the huge mass of earth we are living on, that he will consume; his wrath has been revealed from heaven against us ungodly and unrighteous men, and when our world is destroyed, unless something is done to save us, we ourselves shall be destroyed with it; the long threatened wrath will come upon us, and engulf us all in one wide and, what the scripture calls, "everlasting destruction."

It is useless then, in this part of our subject, to go into character, to ask what sort of men we are; there is a sentence gone forth against the whole human race, and to know whether we are included in it, we have only to ask whether we belong to that race; in other words, whether we are men. The universality of this condemnation is grounded on the universality of the sin which has drawn it forth. "All have sinned;" "the whole world lieth in wickedness;" therefore it is that the whole world is condemned, that we are all without exception included in one general sentence of judgment and destruction.

But further—the *destruction threatened against the world in Noah's days, appeared a very strange and most unlikely one.* We know that the people who heard of it, could not be brought to anticipate it. Our Lord tells us that it came upon them unawares. They knew it not, he says, until it came. They might have known it; they had warning enough of it; but they did not believe the warning. The flood, when it came, surprised them as much as though they had never heard of it. And was this wonderful? We shall say if we consider the matter, not at all so. "Where," they might reasonably ask as they pointed to the lofty mountain and the wide-spread plain, "where are the waters to come from, which, we are told, are to overwhelm these? They are not in existence: and what if they were? There is a merciful God also in existence, and he will never visit this fair world, a world of his own creation, with so much misery. The thing is too strange. Noah may predict it, but while there is a

God of love ruling in the heavens, while all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, we will not believe him." The conclusion they thus came to, was a wrong, but it must have seemed at the time a right one. It had experience, it had reason or a shew of reason, it had general opinion, in its favour. Men did not expect destruction, for they saw no ground to expect it.

And here again, to a considerable extent, the resemblance holds good. Men now do not expect destruction. There are those perhaps among ourselves, who have fully persuaded themselves it will never come. We read of it in our bibles; we are told there plainly enough that there is a day of wrath hastening on, a day in which all the workers of iniquity will be destroyed, the wicked in one fearful multitude be turned into hell and all the people that forget God; but what is the actual state of our minds with respect to this? It is too strange, too dreadful, we think, to be true. God may threaten it, but unless in some extreme cases, he is too merciful ever to execute it. The earth may be destroyed, the sun may be darkened, world after world may roll away and disappear, but as for us, we shall escape. Notwithstanding all we have read and heard, in some way or other a merciful God will spare and save us. And here we leave the matter. Like the men before the flood, we conclude from the greatness and strangeness of the destruction threatened, that it will never come.

This then was the situation of Noah at this time—he was living in a world which God had declared he was about to destroy, but which no one expected to be destroyed.

II. Let us see *what the patriarch's own conduct was in this situation.*

He "prepared an ark," we read, "to the saving of his house." This however was not done from any suggestion of his own mind, or because it appeared the best way or even a likely way of preserving his family; he did it in a simple obedience to the divine command. He had found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and the Lord had promised to save him from the coming deluge. At the same time he had told him that he must look for this deliverance only in one way; he must build an immense ark, and this ark, in God's hands, should be the means of his preservation.

At this distance of time, and in circumstances so different, we

can scarcely estimate the real character of his obedience. Ships probably had then never been heard of, so that his obedience involved in it the doing of a new and strange thing, and also apparently an insufficient thing. The ark may be built, but will it answer its intended purpose when it is built? Can a structure so unwieldy, so heavily laden, with so few to manage it, ever bear the battling of the elements? ever ride securely over waters that are to destroy a world? And it must have been a most laborious and costly work. More than a hundred years of Noah's life appear to have been consumed in it, and he could not have accomplished it without subjecting himself to much self-denial and difficulty in order to obtain the means of carrying it on. And besides this, there was the constant ridicule and scoffing of all who beheld it, for him to bear; he and his ark were the jests perhaps of half the world. But Noah obeyed; he persevered. Year after year he went on adding beam to beam and plank to plank, till the whole huge edifice was finished and complete. And then he did not wait till the waters came down; before a fountain opened or a cloud burst, he and his children, at God's command, quietly went into it. There was obedience; and it is pleasant to see the notice taken of it in God's word. It seems as though the Holy Spirit himself admired it, and intended us to admire it. "Thus did Noah," we read; "according to all that God commanded him, so did he." And again; "Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him."

Shall I say, brethren, that this is the way in which you and I must save ourselves from coming wrath? It is useless to think that God is merciful, and therefore we shall be saved; that he has a favour unto us, and therefore, when the tempest bursts, he will deliver us. God must be obeyed before he will deliver any man; his mercy must be sought in his own appointed way, or we shall never find it; he will be bowed down to as our Master and Lord before he will shew himself our Saviour. What is the truth at this moment as regards ourselves? We have no ark to prepare as Noah had. Blessed be God, he himself has prepared an ark for us; has not only appointed for us a way of salvation, planned and ordered it, with his own right hand and with his holy arm he has wrought and finished it. In Christ Jesus there is a complete salvation for us, an eternal redemption; and he calls upon every one of us to flee, as it were, into Jesus Christ,

that we may obtain it. He points him out to us as a refuge from the coming storm, and tells us that if we will but hide ourselves in him, come what will, we shall be safe. Now, brethren, for you and me to be looking about hither and thither for other means of deliverance, or to spend our labour in building up or trying to build up refuges of our own, or to talk one to another of God's mercy, and do nothing, saying that we are sure, though we do nothing, mercy will save us at the last—what is this? It is disobedience, and it can never prosper. This is not like Noah's building the ark and entering it; it is the same as though Noah had built a tower instead of an ark, and said, "This is stronger and better, this shall save me;" or gone up to some mountain top, and said, "I shall be secure here;" or remained in inactivity and indifference where he was, and trusted to God, or to accident and chance, to save him. There is no security for any sinner but in Christ Jesus, no salvation in any other. If you ask, why not? there is a two-fold reason to be given—it is not becoming God's holy character and nature to save sinners but through him; and it would be most unbecoming the lofty station that he fills, to save them in any way but in the way he has appointed. He is the great Governor of all the earth, and even in dispensing his mercy, he must be obeyed. It would dishonour the throne he sits on, though it is a throne of grace, to grant his salvation to any but those who bow down to his authority and will.

III. We come now to *the principle from which Noah's obedience proceeded*. It was faith, the apostle says; "By faith Noah prepared an ark."

In the first verse of this chapter, he defines faith. It "is the substance of things hoped for," he says; that which gives these things in our minds a real, substantial existence. He then widens his definition—"it is the evidence," he adds, "of things not seen." Before, he confined the exercise of faith to things hoped for, future blessings; now he brings unseen things of every kind within its operation, things past as well as future, and evil things as well as good. Faith, he says, is the evidence of them; that is, it leads us to regard them as real, brings them within our sight, makes us feel and act with respect to them as though we beheld them. Now come to the text. "Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet," the approaching

deluge, believed God, and in consequence of his believing him, expected this deluge. By faith he saw it, saw it approaching. In the sky above him, in the world around him, all was yet quiet; to the eye of sense there was no destruction impending: within Noah's mind there was another eye at work, the eye of faith, and with that he beheld before him a sweeping deluge and a drowning world; and beholding this, he got ready for it; he "built an ark to the saving of his house." Here was faith, first, in God's warning—the flood will certainly come; here was faith too in God's promise or rather in God's command implying a promise—"If I build the ark he has commanded, it will save me when the flood comes." And when a sinner flies for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, his appointed Saviour, it is faith that leads him to Christ, and it is exactly thus his faith works. He has been taught at last that God really means something when he threatens destruction to sinful men, and, at the same time, that he may trust his mercy for salvation, when in obedience to his command, he seeks salvation in his Son. "There is the danger," says God, "and there is the deliverance;" the sinner through grace believes him, and he is seen fleeing from the danger to the great deliverance.

But what we are chiefly to notice here, is, that true faith embraces all God's declarations, his threatenings as well as his promises. It does not pick and choose out of God's word what it shall take and what it shall reject. "No," it says, "I dare not so treat it. It is all true, every letter of it; and it is all important, or God would not have written it. I may therefore credit it all, and I must credit it all." It is all for our souls' good, brethren, and we sin against our own souls as well as against God, if we pass over any part of it. That is a very sickly faith, which can lay hold of the divine promises only; and that is a very sickly and poor religion, which shrinks away from any one of the divine threatenings. The heart in such cases cannot be established in grace. It cannot have much confidence in God. Nor can it have known much of real, practical religion. It cannot have fought many battles with its own corruptions, or it would have found out before now the use of God's threatenings to restrain and fetter them. Sin at times bears down the promises. We do not care about grace and peace, and mercy and love; our taste for them is gone. We want some worldly good, some earthly delight, and nothing will stop

us in the pursuit of this but a sword or a threat, a blow from God's hand or an expectation of one. That is the holiest heart, which is most under the influence of God's word; which, like Noah's heart, is full of faith in all that God declares; which, when he warns, believes his warnings, puts as much faith in them as in his promises, makes use of them, is familiar with them, knows their value, prizes them, would not cross one of them out of God's blessed book even if it could. Would you see what true faith is, brethren? Look at it in Noah anticipating a deluge when the Lord forewarns him there is one coming. And would you see it again? Look at it again in Noah building an ark and committing himself calmly to it, when God has once commanded him to build and enter it.

But there is something more in the text.

IV. It lays open to us *the feeling by which faith wrought in the patriarch's mind*. "Moved with fear," the apostle says, "he prepared an ark to the saving of his house."

And whence did this fear come? It came from his faith, and through it his faith wrought. A belief in God's warnings excited in him a holy fear of God's judgments, and this fear impelled him to set about preparing the means of deliverance God had appointed him.

But faith, we may say, produces confidence and hope; how then can fear be ascribed to it? The effect produced by faith is as various as the objects on which it is exercised. It takes its character from those objects. Place a promise before faith, it rejoices in hope; present a threatening to it, it trembles and fears. Fear is not always inconsistent with faith. On the contrary, it is often closely connected with it, and grows out of it. These two graces are described here as both existing in the same man at the same time, and combining one with the other to produce the same effect. Noah's faith led to Noah's fear, and both together to Noah's obedience: they built the ark. We must not then at once say that this or that fear within us springs from unbelief; it may have its origin in faith itself; it may be intended by God to be faith's instrument within us in order to turn us from some evil or to work in us some good. We must look at our fears before we cast them away. Whence do they arise? From the workings of our own minds, from our own reasonings, from forgetfulness of God's word and promises?

Then the sooner we cast them away, and utterly cast them away, the better. But are they grounded on God's word, on God's word rightly interpreted and understood? Do they spring from a growing conviction in our minds that his word is more important and true than we once thought it? And do we find them urging us to fly from our spiritual evils and dangers, and impelling us with an almost irresistible force to submit to God's will and grace? Then cherish your fears, brethren; they are worth the cherishing. If you are not already in the ark, they may lead you into it; and if you are in it, through the Spirit's power they may keep you there. "Happy is the man that" thus "feareth alway." There is this difference between real Christians and all other men—they tremble at God's word, others make light of it. Other men tremble when the tempest comes, these men tremble before it comes, at the prospect of it. The ungodly believe and tremble in hell when it is too late to escape, the people of God believe and tremble on earth, and believing, flee and escape.

And now I would speak to you all. I will suppose you all to be in a situation very similar to that in which Noah was, when the Lord first told him of a coming deluge. I will suppose you also to be aware of your situation, and affected by it. The great day of judgment is often in your thoughts, and you cannot help shrinking with fear whenever you seriously enquire what the consequences of that day will be to you. Now let me ask, what have your expectations of judgment and your fear of it done for you, or rather what have they impelled you to do? I do not say, have they led you to build an ark for your safety, for there is an ark already built for you. The door of it stands ever open, and God has invited you a thousand times, and is inviting you still, to enter into it. He tells you that in Christ Jesus there is a ready welcome for every sinner, and perfect safety; that there is no condemnation and can be none for those that are in him; that to commit yourselves to his care and keeping, is to be safe in judgment and happy in eternity. He goes farther than this; he commands you to commit yourselves to him, he has made it your duty to believe in him for the saving of your souls. Brethren, have you done this? Are you doing it still? Have you this very day said at the feet of Jesus Christ, "Lord, I am guilty, and perishing, and helpless. O save

me!" If not, then your fears have as yet done very little for you; they have in fact done nothing. If they have not made you willing and obedient, have not yet brought you to Christ, you have still the turning point to pass between life and death, salvation and destruction. It is well to fear, but it is not fear, it is obedience, it is practice, it is the soul's turning itself to its appointed Saviour, that is the all in all in religion; not hearing of the ark, not thinking of it, not looking at it, not wishing ourselves within it, but entering it, going in at the door with all our guilt, and sins, and misery, about us, and hiding ourselves there. Ask what real religion is in a world like this—it is a sinner's fleeing at God's command to a Saviour; it is a sinner's readiness to abandon, lose, suffer, do, any thing, so that he may at last win Christ and be found in him.

Some of you may be in doubt whether you have done this or not, whether you have entered the ark or not. There was a time when you trusted you had done so. You saw a tempest of wrath coming on you, and you fled to the Lord Jesus for deliverance from it. You embraced, as you thought, God's promises to sinners in the gospel. They were certainly very precious to you, and for a season you greatly rejoiced in them. But now, you go on to say, your old fears often return. A sense of sin and danger often disquiets you. You are often forced to come anew to your Saviour, not, as you would wish to do, like his happy people, but as perishing sinners who fly for the first time to his feet. In fact, you say, you often find yourselves just the same fearing, trembling men that you were when you first cast yourselves down before him and cried for mercy. From all this you infer that your character is suspicious and your religion perhaps a delusion. But, brethren, turn to this text. Here is fear in godly Noah's mind, a fear too of God's judgments, a fear brought on by God's threatenings, a fear existing also at the same time that he is preparing an ark which, he is quite sure, will preserve him. And think too of his situation when he was floating in that ark. It was a secure one, we know, but yet an awful one. Around him, a world of waters; beneath him, convulsions rending the earth and tearing it; above him, storm, and tempest, and an angry God; and he himself shut up in a vessel that might be dashed to pieces in any moment, driving he knew not whither. Did he, think you, never feel a thrill, never know a fear, in a situation like this? Surely if he feared before he

entered that ark, he must have often feared far more when he was in it. You know how to apply this. It is God's will that you should still see your dangers and feel them. For this purpose he keeps you among them. He saves you so, that every step of your salvation reminds you of your dangers, and when he calls on you to work out your own salvation, he bids you do it under a sense of them, "with fear and trembling." This fear that you are ready to think is against you, he employs for you; it is one grand instrument that he makes use of to keep you near him and keep you safe. Do not aim then to get it out of your hearts; aim rather to have it kept there in its right place. It may not be the most pleasurable feeling you experience nor the noblest, but day by day it will become more pleasurable and nobler; it will blend more naturally with faith, and with hope and joy; it will be softened by them, while it is elevated and refined. The pain of it will go, but the blessedness of it will remain. You will know on earth what the blessedness of godly fear means, and when you wake up in heaven, you will be "moved with fear" still, a fear which the Christian cannot describe, but yet a fear which he feels can live and flourish among heaven's glories and heaven's joys.

SERMON XVII.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

HAGAR IN THE WILDERNESS.

GENESIS XXI. 19.—"And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water."

THIS was Hagar, Abraham's bondwoman. We find her in this chapter distressed and sinking in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

I. Let us look at *the circumstances which brought her into this situation.*

The Lord had promised Abraham a son, and, through that son, he had engaged to make him the father of a great nation. Still, year after year passed away, and though the promise was again and again renewed, there appeared no prospect whatever of its being accomplished. Abraham himself seems to have borne this delay well, but not so Sarah, his wife. She becomes at last impatient, and, with a strange mixture of faith, unbelief, and presumption, takes the accomplishment of the divine promise into her own hands. Despairing of becoming herself a parent, and pitying perhaps the long deferred hope of her husband, she proposes to him that he should take a second wife from among her household servants, and points out to him Hagar, an Egyptian slave. In an evil hour the patriarch yields to her solicitations, and receives Hagar from her hands. A holy God, we may say, will never prosper this; but for a time the plan seems to prosper. Hagar will soon be a mother, and, with the promised seed, the promised nation and greatness, we might suppose, will come. The Lord seldom baffles human policy at first, brethren. He generally gives it time to become a scourge to us before he finally overthrows it. He did so in this case. Hagar, naturally elated with her situation, begins to despise Sarah, and Sarah to deal harshly with her. There is discord introduced into Abraham's once peaceful tent—that was the first bitter fruit of his folly and sin.

In due time Ishmael is born, and for several years, perhaps fifteen, Abraham appears to have regarded him as the son promised him. At last however the Lord tells him that what Sarah had so long ago thought impossible, should now, when it seemed farther than ever from possible, actually come to pass. She herself in her old age shall bear him a son, in whom, and not in Ishmael, the great promises so often made to him shall have their fulfilment. The old man's answer is a touching one. Instead of rejoicing in the prospect of another son, and that son his beloved Sarah's, his heart yearns over the boy he already possessed, and with a voice of earnest entreaty he cries out unto God, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" The divine purposes however are fixed. The Lord denies his request. He promises him indeed a blessing for Ishmael, but in Isaac, his future son, he tells him, shall his seed be called.

About a year after this, Isaac is born, and at a feast made when the child is weaned, Ishmael, now seventeen years of age,

is seen by Sarah deriding him. This brings matters to a crisis. Sarah will bear no more; she insists on it that the bondwoman and her son shall be sent away. And now poor Abraham reaps the full reward of his folly. "The thing was very grievous in his sight," we read, "because of his son." Hagar he could spare, but how part with his child? He seems to have referred the matter to God, and God tells him kindly but plainly, that what Sarah has required, must be done—the mother and her child must be dismissed. And now the servant of the Lord puts on his strength, and acts like a servant of the Lord. When God commanded him to circumcise himself and his family, he did it "the self-same day;" and now he is commanded, probably in a vision of the night, to put away Hagar and her son, there is again no hesitation, no delay; "he rises up early in the morning," doubtless the very next morning, and sends them off—with what feelings, it is not said, but the simple narrative given us here of the transaction, clearly reveals to us what was passing in his heart. With his own hand he ministers to Hagar, as though he were the slave, and not she. "He took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto her, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away."

There, brethren, is the fruit of sin, of sin, remember, in one of God's dearest servants—a rending of the very heart-strings, a father, and a fond one, severed for ever from his child, and that child one who for sixteen years at least had absorbed all his parental affections, been his only child. But this is only one side of the picture. See here too the strength and the obedience of even an erring servant of God. "If thy hand offend thee," says Christ, "cut it off. If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." We are to do more than submit to the loss of these offending members; we are ourselves to separate them and cast them away. So Abraham here, when God says to him, "That woman and that child must go," does more than acquiesce. He does not leave it to Sarah, or leave it to God, to make the separation; he makes it himself, and with as much promptitude as though he were doing a pleasurable rather than an agonizing thing. Such is the power of Jehovah's grace in man's weak heart. The corruption of our nature is indeed strong, strong in the very best of men, and indications enough do they give us of its strength and of their own weakness beneath it; but while we acknowledge this and mourn over it, we must not lose sight of

the greater strength of the Spirit of God within us. "Crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts," says the scripture. "We cannot do it," we answer; "these affections are too strong within us to be mastered." But God takes up the command, presses it home upon our conscience; with the command comes the power to obey it; and the strongest, tenderest feelings of our nature give way. They are not eradicated, but they are mortified, they are conquered, they are subjected to the law and will of God. Abraham with his two sons, this sending away of the one and the subsequent lifting up of his arm on mount Moriah to slay the other, are glorious proofs that God can do any thing he pleases with man's weak heart, and enable man—man in his weakness and corruption—to do any thing he pleases at his command.

II. And now, leaving Abraham, let us follow Hagar, and notice *the effect produced on her by the desolate situation* into which she is brought.

It was doubtless Abraham's intention that she should go to her own country, Egypt, where she probably still had relatives or friends. We may reasonably conclude too that he gave her adequate means of support for herself and her child in the journey. But we are not told this. All we are told is, that "she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba." Absorbed in her own sorrowful and bitter feelings, she lost her way perhaps; or perhaps she lingered about in Abraham's country in the hope that he might relent and she be re-called. But by and by her supply of water is gone; it is all "spent in the bottle;" and to be without water in an eastern desert is very soon to perish. She seems to have at once given herself up to perish, and her child with her. "She cast him," we read, "under one of the shrubs," and as though her cup of misery was too full to let her witness his sufferings, "she went and sat her down over against him a good way off," and there abandoned herself to despair. "She sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept."

"And just so," some of you perhaps may be ready to say, "should we have acted in her situation. What else could she do?" I answer, here is despair, brethren, and despair was never intended for man in this world of mercy, let his situation in it be as afflictive, and his circumstances as desperate, as they may.

But before we come to this point, let me just ask, is there any one here who would admire this woman's feelings in getting out of the sight of her child's dying pangs? It was false feeling, natural perhaps, but selfish and wrong. Would you see how a nobler woman would have acted in such a situation? Look at perhaps the noblest of all women in a situation somewhat like this. She too has a dying son. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother"—by his cross, close to him, close as she could get, in the near sight of his dying agony, within the sound of his expiring voice. That was a great woman—this was an affectionate, but a weak one. I need not say which a Christian mother should resemble.

It is not however Hagar's weakness as a parent, that is most conspicuous here; it is her despair. And that this was wrong, well founded as it seems, will be clear if we remember,

1. It was despair *in opposition to God's plain promises.*

"Let me not see the death of the child," she says. Why the Lord himself had spoken to her from heaven years ago, and told her that that very child should live to be a man and a powerful and great one. And this promise he had renewed but a short time before to Abraham, who would naturally mention the renewal of it to her. But in this hour of seeming danger, Jehovah's words are as nothing to her; she either does not think of or she disbelieves them. "My child must die," she says, and casts him down to die. How like ourselves in some of our trials!

We are commanded to live by faith, and we try to do so, and sometimes, the Lord helping us, we can do so. The divine promises are as a rock underneath us. Jehovah's word, we feel, must be fulfilled, and we no more regard the obstacles that seem to oppose its fulfilment, than we do the dark clouds in the east when the sun is rising, or the sandbank in the ocean that threatens to keep back the coming tide. But what are these promises to us at other times? Our rock is gone. We think and feel, and too often we speak and act, as though we could not find a single promise to stay our souls on. We do not even look for one. Absorbed in our dangers, or miseries, or sins, we treat Jehovah's purposes and Jehovah's words as though they were not worth thinking of, fit only to comfort us in a bright and quiet day, of no use to us whatever in darkness and the storm.

2. The despair of Hagar was despair *in opposition to her own experience.*

This was not the first time she had been in a desert. If you turn to the sixteenth chapter of this book, you will see that she fled into one when Sarah began to deal hardly with her. And there, we might have expected, the Lord would have left her to reap the fruit of her rashness; but not so. He is observant of her there. He condescends to speak to her, to comfort her, to let her see how great an interest he took, slave as she was, in her welfare. And this at the time made a great impression on her. In admiration of the Lord's goodness, she calls the place where she had experienced it, by a name implying, "Thou, God, seest me." But this is now clean forgotten. The wilderness she is in, does not remind her of the other wilderness she was once in. She does not say, "Lord, thou sawedst me in my folly before that child was born, and pitiedst me; thou seest me now in my misery, O pity me again." She makes no appeal to God. She merely sits down, lifts up her voice, and weeps. Ourselves again, brethren.

"I know whom I have believed. The experience I myself have had in days past of my Saviour's love and faithfulness encourages me, nay, compels me, to trust him now"—all of us who are Christians indeed, know what this means; and we know quite as well what something very different from this means; what it is to have new trials come, and completely banish for a time all remembrance from our minds of our past mercies. The Lord brings us into a desert and appears for us there. "I can never forget this," we say. "The remembrance of this mercy will be a stay to me all my life long." But we get into the desert again, and what do we say then? "The Lord will help me again? He hath delivered, and doth deliver, and will yet deliver? Because thou hast been my help, therefore under the shadow of thy wings will I even here rejoice?" we say almost any thing rather than this. All the many proofs we have had of the Lord's power and faithfulness, are as much out of our thoughts as though we had never had one of them. The goodness and mercy, the wonderful goodness and mercy, that have followed us all our life long, are no more to us than they would have been had they never come near us.

3. Hagar's despair was despair *in opposition to fact also.* It was despair in the very midst of abundance. Observe, the

water that was needed to save her child's life, was close by her, within her sight and reach, at the very time she was saying, "My child must die for the want of it." The text seems to imply this. It does not say that the Lord opened for her at the moment the well of water beside her; it intimates rather that it was there before, but she, bewildered with her bodily and mental sufferings, had not seen it.

What a picture, brethren, of poor man sitting down and weeping in sorrow and despondency in this world of abounding mercy! The truth is, not that we have a God in heaven who cares for us miserable sinners and is willing to provide for us in our sin and misery the help and salvation we need, he has already provided it and in the richest abundance. A fountain he has long ago opened in Christ Jesus for us. "Wells of salvation," as he calls them, well upon well has he opened for our refreshment and comfort, and he bids us come and draw water with joy freely from them. He says indeed, "when the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst," that he will then "open rivers in the high places for them, and fountains in the midst of the valleys," but, brethren, though he speaks thus, the thing is already done; the rivers have already burst forth in the high places for us, the fountains are already opened and are running over for us in the valleys. The gospel feast is not now preparing, it is prepared. The gospel invitation is, "All things are ready; come and take them." Do we want salvation for our perishing souls? The gospel does not speak to us as a man on the shore might speak to a shivering mariner who is calling out to him from his wreck for assistance—"Wait; I will make ready a life-boat, and launch it, and send it over the billows to you;" it says, "The life-boat is out; it has reached you; it is close by your side; spring into it and be safe." And the same may be said, for the same is true, of every blessing we can need both for body and for soul, for time and for eternity—all are prepared for us, all are waiting for us, all are by our side. The world is indeed a desert, but it is a desert with an overflowing, inexhaustible well in it; for the Lord Jesus Christ is in it in the fulness of the Godhead, the fulness of the divine grace and love. The Father has, as it were, emptied himself into the Lord Jesus, made over to him all his abundance; and he, with all this abundance in him, is come among us, come to us near as he can come, placed himself

within the reach of every sinful, every wretched man. "Lo, I am with you," he says, "with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Despair then and sinking despondency, giving up this and that and even heaven itself as lost—this is Hagar, brethren, sitting down to perish by the well's side; it is being in straits in the very fulness of sufficiency; it is dying with hunger at an abundant feast; it is shutting our eyes at noon-day and saying, "There is no light."

III. Let us look now at *the interposition of God in behalf of this despairing woman*, the mercy he shewed her. It consisted, you observe, in this one simple thing, he "opened her eyes." He did no more for her, for no more was needed. There the help was, the water that she wanted; he enabled her to see it, and that was enough. "She went and filled the bottle with water," and then, flying to her dying child, "she gave the lad drink."

Wondering, happy woman! we say; but not more wondering or more happy than many a despairing sinner has been, when the Lord has opened his eyes and discovered to him his great salvation, his abounding mercy, the fountain of living waters he has provided for him in Christ Jesus. It seems strange that we in this Christian land, this land of light, do not all see this fountain, but there is a blindness come over the soul of man. The grace of God manifested in the Lord Jesus, appearing, shining forth in his gospel as clearly as the sun ever shone in the heavens—we may hear of this, it may be pointed out to us every sabbath we live, and we may be urged to look at it, but we shall never see it, never know any thing of it, till the living God opens our eyes and enables us to discern it. All the suns and stars in the universe, were they all shining around him in one blaze of light, would never make a blind man see; nor would all the gospel light that could possibly be poured around us, ever of itself reveal to us God's salvation. We want "an unction from the Holy One;" we want the enlightening of our minds by the God who made our minds; we want our spiritual sight restored by him; then shall we see his grace and his glory as they shine forth in the face of Jesus Christ: then shall we fly, like Hagar, to the fountain, and, like her, wonder and rejoice.

And observe how freely and spontaneously the Lord shewed this woman this mercy. He generally appears for us in our

difficulties in answer to our prayers. He makes our dangers, or sorrows, or wants, or sins, excite us to prayer, and then, when they have done this, he interposes for us. "Call upon me," is his promise, "in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." But here, as far as we can see, there is no calling upon him. Hagar is no where said to pray; her child is no where said to pray. What brings then the Lord in his mercy down? Twice over we are told, "the voice of the lad" brings him down; his complaints, his cries, his expressions of misery. We often say, prayer has a voice for God, but we see here that suffering has a voice for God. "I have seen, I have seen, the affliction of my people," he says of his captive Israel, "and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them." "When the poor and needy seek water," he says again, "and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them;" he will hear them though not a word are they said to utter; their suffering, their speechless, silent suffering, shall reach his ear and move his mercy.

Now what are we to gather from this? That we need not pray? not call upon God in our wants and miseries? No. God's mercy is not to be the rule for our conduct, but God's commands. His mercy is so abundant, that he will sometimes help the man who calls not upon his name, but his command to us all is to call upon his name. No matter how needy or wretched we are, we have no more warrant to expect any mercy from him without prayer, than we have to expect food without seeking it, to expect the ravens to feed us or the hard rock to give us drink. But then, looking at this history, we may say, if there is sometimes so much mercy for a poor, despairing sinner without prayer, what is there for us with prayer? Want, misery, suffering, have prevailed with God here, brought the supply; add to these entreaty, and supplication, and a casting of the sinking soul on God—what will come then? Here is despair helped and relieved, the despair that dishonours God, forgets his mercies and disbelieves his promises; take that despair away and put faith in its place, the faith that glorifies God, proclaiming him worthy to be trusted, able and willing to fulfil every word of his gracious lips; and what will God do? O brethren, try what he will do. Call you upon him; trust him. Shall I tell you the best thing, or one of the best things, he can do for you? It is to shew you what he has already done; not to give you this

or to give you that; not to fill some scanty bottle again for you, soon again to be spent; it is to open your eyes that you may see the fountain; it is to discover to you the fulness of blessings he has treasured up in his dear Son for you, and that Son's readiness to supply your wants from them; it is to let you see that you have an all-sufficient God for your Helper, Comforter, and Saviour, and that all-sufficient God very near, "very present" with you.

What is really the situation of every one now within these walls? Despairing or not despairing, weeping or rejoicing, it is very like the situation of Hagar by this well's side—desolation around him, a thirsty soul within him, death coming on, and yet within one step of him salvation, deliverance, a fountain of life, comfort, and blessedness. Well may God speak to us from heaven and say, "Why will ye die? Why will ye even weep? Here are all my glorious riches spread out before you, and you may have all your need supplied from them as freely as you may open your eyes and take in the light."

SERMON XVIII.

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

THE PRAYER OF CONTRITE ISRAEL.

JEREMIAH XIV. 7.—"O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake."

WE profess to-day to be humbling ourselves before our God for our transgressions. Here is a prayer of God's afflicted and humbled Israel. May he himself incline and enable us to take it as our own!

We find in it, first, a mournful fact acknowledged; then, a petition offered; and then, a plea urged why this petition should be granted.

I. "Our iniquities," says the prophet, "testify against us." This is *the fact he acknowledges*, and he states it as a fact. He does not mean to intimate that possibly it may be so; he means that certainly it is so, and that he and his companions in affliction feel it to be so.

By "testifying against them," he means bearing witness against them. The expression is a legal one. It describes our sins as rising up against us, coming into court with us, accusing us, declaring and proving us guilty.

And the prophet says this, observe, in the name of the church, God's own church, and that while she knows and feels herself to be such; not in some moment of depression when she doubts whether she belongs to him or not, but at a time when she feels sure that she belongs to him, and he is owning her as his; for she addresses him in the next verse as her "hope" and her "Saviour," and in the verse following she says, "Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name."

Now from all this we gather that *even in the case of God's own people, sin does not pass away and die after it is committed*, no, nor even after it is pardoned. We are apt to think there is an end of it when the precious blood of Christ has once gone over it, and so in one point of view there is—that sin shall never separate us from God's love, shall never bring us into final condemnation; but it is not come to a complete end yet. We may bury it and forget it, but, as our old divines often say, it is buried alive, and sooner or later it will rise up again; it will meet us again; we shall see it coming out of its grave a living and swift witness against us.

And there is another truth contained here—*the sins of God's people bear testimony against them*, an open and public testimony.

They witness against them before God. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee," says the psalmist, "our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."

And they witness against them to others. They proclaim them to the whole spiritual world to be vile, guilty creatures, undeserving of any one of the many blessings they are receiving; yea, deserving of nothing but Jehovah's utmost abhorrence and displeasure.

And our sins, the prophet intimates, testify against us at times to ourselves also. Besides that public testimony which

they are always giving to others, there is a secret testimony they are sometimes bearing in our own hearts. And this appears to be the leading idea in the prophet's words. He seems to have had in his mind at this time an unusually deep sense of his own and Israel's transgressions, and when he speaks of their iniquities testifying against them, he means perhaps mainly that they were become at last deeply conscious of their iniquities; that they could not deny and did not wish to deny them; that they were like criminals conscience-stricken, obliged, whether they would or not, to plead guilty at God's bar, to own themselves just as culpable and base as their sins declared them. Mark the end of the verse. The church there bears witness against herself. The testimony of her sins, she seems to say, is true; "Our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee." And this same thing is very forcibly stated in another of her confessions; "Our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them."

And there is something else to be remarked—*our sins are peculiarly apt to bear this secret testimony against us, when we attempt to draw near to God.*

The prophet, you observe here, is praying, supplicating divine help and mercy; but no sooner does he begin to do so, than sin stares him in the face, and tells him that he is a guilty creature, deserving of no help. It would stop his mouth if it could, but though it cannot do this, it meets him at the throne of grace and testifies against him. And how often, brethren, have our iniquities done the same! We have gone hither and thither, been engaged through the week in our various pursuits, and have hardly once remembered perhaps that we are guilty; but the sabbath has come. "Now," we have said, "we will call home our scattered thoughts. We will turn anew to our half-forsaken God. We will go up to his house, and hold once more some blessed communion with him." But sin meets us in his house, or probably before we get there. "How," we say then, "can we dare to draw near to God? How can we hope for any mercy from him or even ask for it?" The sins which had been lying buried through the week in the world's bustle and the world's darkness, come out all at once into light and life, and do indeed bear witness against us. Like criminals whose sins have just found them out, so are our souls. Sin has

found them out. It startles them. It alarms and dismays them. A sense of guilt, shame, and self-loathing, take possession of us, and sometimes well nigh break our hearts. Thus was it with the pious Ezra. "O my God," he says, "I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities are increased over our head and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens."

You see now, brethren, the class of persons this text brings before us. They are those among God's servants, who feel that their sins are testifying against them before heaven, and whose consciences tell them they can scarcely testify against them too much. They are self-accusing men, self-condemning men, and self-abhorring men. And the situation in which it places them, seems to be very like that in which we now stand or appear to stand—they wish to draw near to God, they have turned aside from the world for supplication and prayer. Some of you perhaps see a very close resemblance between yourselves and these men. For you then doubtless, or such as you, this text was written. It tells you how to act. It says to you, "See what these contrite believers of old did when conscience smote them; and you, by God's help, must this day do the same."

II. Look at *the prayer they offered*. It consists of three words only, "Do thou it;" but short as it is, we may find something in it to instruct us.

Observe *its humble boldness*. Under other circumstances there would be nothing remarkable in this, but we have here a prayer offered up while sin is accusing and conscience smiting. It is not a dutiful child's prayer to a father well pleased with it; it is a criminal's prayer to his judge, and that at a time when there are ten thousand voices bearing witness against him, and his own conscience is telling him that all they witness against him is true. It is a cry for mercy when all within him and without him is declaring that he merits vengeance.

A sense of sin in an ungodly man's heart drives him from God. Such is its natural tendency. Our first parents, as soon as they had sinned, hid themselves, we are told, from the presence of the Lord God; and from that hour to this, every natural man no sooner says within himself, "I am guilty," than he says this also within himself, "Would that there were no God in the heavens, or that I had nothing to do with him, or

could hide myself from him!" And when the Spirit of God comes in and renews the heart, this tendency of sin still remains in us. The natural language of the soul still is, "I am vile, and must, if I can, get out of God's sight." Think of Peter. By means of a miracle God converts him, he makes him a believer in Jesus; and the first thing the man does is to wish to get away from this merciful Jesus, even from the very Being whom he now sees to be his Messiah and Saviour. "He fell down at Jesus' feet," he called him Lord, he prayed to him, but his prayer was not, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David;" it was, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!" And the same thing goes on even in the case of the experienced Christian. When our iniquities testify loudly against us, when we feel sin brought home powerfully by the Holy Spirit to our consciences, "There is an end to prayer," we are tempted to say: "with all this guilt and pollution upon us, we must not attempt to go into God's presence." All freedom and confidence in our approach to God are for the time at an end. We stand afar off, and feel that there we ought to stand and must stand.

Now one of the hardest lessons we have to learn in Christ's school, is to overcome this tendency in sin to drive us from the Lord. I do not mean that we are not to feel it, for that is impossible; but we are not to be ruled and governed, not to be driven from God, by it. God, as he is revealed to us in the gospel, is the sinner's God, and what the sinner has to learn in the gospel is, that as a sinner he may draw near to him, and find favour with him, and be accepted by him, and pardoned, and loved. We are then in a right frame of mind, not when we are saying, "We are so sinful that we dare not pray;" nor yet when we are saying, "We are believers in Christ Jesus; God sees now no sin in us, and therefore we may pray;" but then when sin is crying out against us and crying out within us, when we feel ourselves more base than words could tell, and are laid low as the dust in shame and self-abhorrence; then to turn to God and feel we may turn to him, then to come boldly to his throne of grace and ask mercy and grace of him, then to hope in him, then to say with this prophet, "O the hope of Israel and the Saviour thereof"—that, brethren, is the right position of a believer in Jesus Christ, and a position in which none but a believer in Jesus Christ ever stood. O aim every

one of you to get into it. If your iniquities are testifying against you, do not aim to silence their voice; let no one ever make you believe that God does not hear the witness they bear, and that you need not heed it; but aim at this—to believe all that your sins say against you, and yet in spite of it all to seek God's mercy and trust in it. That mercy you must have; you cannot do without it. Let your language therefore be, "We must seek it; we must obtain it. O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it. Shew us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation."

But notice another feature in this prayer—the *lowly submission it manifests*. Our translators, you perceive, have added a word to it—the last word. It stands in the original simply, "Do thou."

There can be no doubt but that next to the pardon of her sin, deliverance from her troubles was the blessing the afflicted church most desired at this time; but she does not ask for it. Her mouth seems suddenly stopped as she is about to ask for it. She feels as though in her situation, with her enormous sins crying out so loudly against her, she must not dare to choose for herself any blessing. All she says is, "Do thou. Do thou something for us. Interfere for us. Give us not up. We will bless thee for any thing thou doest, so that thou wilt not abandon us." Her prayer is like that of the troubled Hezekiah, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me;" or like that of David, "Do thou for me, O God the Lord."

And in a manner like this does every soul pray, that is deeply contrite. It has boldness enough amidst all its guilt to come to God's throne and to keep there, but beyond this it has sometimes no boldness at all. It leaves God to shew mercy to it in his own way, and to deal with it after his own will. It shrinks from prescribing or seeming to prescribe to him. Besides, it wants so much, that it hardly knows what it wants most. It is not like a child in the midst of abundance, well clothed and fed, that comes to his father to ask him for some gift he has not yet bestowed; it is rather like a prodigal who comes to that father's door in need of every thing, naked and hungry, worthless and guilty, polluted and loathsome. It feels that it needs every thing. But it feels too that if its heavenly Father will but look on it, will but pity it, that will be enough. He is so rich, that he can give it all it wants; and so bountiful

that if he gives it any thing, he will keep back nothing that will do it good. All it desires is to be treated as his child, and then come what may, it will bless him for it. Come frowns or smiles, come stripes or caresses, it is thankful. It is in its Father's house and its Father's hands, and that contents it.

III. Let us pass on now to another part of the text—*the plea the prophet urges in support of his prayer.*

It is obvious, brethren, that before a sinner, under such feelings as you have heard described, can venture to pray at all, he must have discovered some strong encouragement to pray. There must be something he can urge in his behalf, something he can appeal to, something to rest his supplications and hopes on, and this of a very extraordinary character. Reason could not help him to any thing of this kind. It might say this and it might say that to him, but one thought of the divine holiness and his own guiltiness would soon silence it. He would feel that without some warrant from God himself, it is one of the most unreasonable things in the world for a sinful creature of God to expect any favour from him. Some of you may not feel this, but then you are not like-minded with the men we have in view. Your sins, it is true, are testifying against you, but you are scarcely aware of it. You call yourselves miserable sinners, but, alas! you know little or nothing of your sinfulness and its misery. Sin is with you a trifling evil, and any thing in the shape of a remedy for it, any thing that pretends to be a remedy for it, you deem sufficient. But not so with the contrite soul. Sin is felt by it to be a fearful, enormous evil; and it must have something great to hope in, something commensurate with the evil itself, before it can look for pardon and deliverance. And this the text points out to us. It is the name or glory of God; "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake."

And here comes before us one of those peculiar truths which constitute the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not only true that God is in himself merciful and gracious, inclined to shew mercy and delighting in shewing it; this also is true—the exercise of his mercy towards sinners through his Son glorifies him. It does more than manifest and display his perfections, it so displays them, that it brings honour to them; it manifests them most gloriously. We accordingly find him declaring to

his sinful church, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "Shew me thy glory," said Moses to him. "This," said God, "is my glory, my chief, my highest glory, that I am merciful and gracious, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin."

Now let the conscience-stricken soul be once brought to understand and believe this, and it finds no difficulty in supplicating Jehovah's mercy. Its vileness still shames and its guilt still humbles and grieves it; but, "Vile and guilty as I am," it says, "my God will bring no dishonour on himself by shewing favour to me. This man or that man, did he see me as I am, would spurn me from him; he would deem himself disgraced by any connection with me; but be I what I may, let my iniquities testify against me as they will, let my fellow-men despise me as they will and justly despise me too, yet I have this to comfort me—I have only to ask in my Saviour's name for mercy, and the great God of heaven can honour his own great name by extending his mercy to me; and the more mercy he shews me, the more he honours himself; the greater the kindness I receive from him, the brighter shines forth the glory of his grace." And then the soul casts itself in all the confidence of faith on God its Redeemer, and neither its past sins nor its present troubles can shake its confidence in him. It has got on ground which, it feels, can sustain its weight. It is sure that while it stands on it, nothing can hurt or move it. "My God," it says, "has bound up his own glory in my salvation, and I am safe." And then it lies down before God, and says again with humble boldness but yet with entire submission, "Do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake. I cannot do for myself. None other can or will do for me what my soul needs. But thou canst do any thing. Thou canst do above all and exceeding abundantly above all I can ask or think. O glorify thy power and grace by dealing with me as with one whom thou lovest."

This prayer then, you perceive, is more than a simple prayer for mercy. The publican's prayer in the temple was that. Any really contrite sinner may offer it; he will offer it and offer it often even to his dying hour. But the prayer before us implies a considerable degree of spiritual knowledge, as well as deep contrition. No man will offer it, till he is become well ac-

quainted with the gospel of Jesus Christ; till he has discovered the wisdom and glory, as well as the grace, of it, and imbibed something of its spirit. God must have shined into his heart to give him the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Naturally we think nothing about God's name or glory, we care nothing about it; and when God first brings us to himself, we can think of little else than our own lost condition and deliverance from it; but after a little we begin to know God, and love God, and adore God, and then his glory begins to have a place in our minds. We think of it; we delight in it. We make it the great object of our desires, the great end of our actions, and one great support of our hopes. It finds its way now into our prayers. We learn to plead it before God. "Hallowed be thy name," ceases to be the mere language of our lips; we long for his name to be hallowed: and now when we say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," we say too and say it naturally, "Do thou it for thy name's sake."

Brethren, do you pray thus? You are come perhaps into God's house to-day with an accusing conscience and a troubled mind. You have had no enjoyment here, and expect to go away without a blessing. Sin has appeared to bar up against you all access to God, marred all your devotion, chilled and damped every pleasurable feeling of your souls. And you would say perhaps that it has often been thus with you, and been so long; that you cannot help it, and scarcely dare try to help it; you are very sinful, and must be content to be comfortless if not wretched.

Now it must strike you at once, that you are not acting as these troubled Israelites acted. You say with them, "Our iniquities testify against us," but you do not say with them, "O Lord, do thou it for thy name's sake." You have learned that you are sinners, but you have yet to learn that sinners such as you, may draw near with full acceptance to the throne of grace; you have yet to see that God can glorify himself in pardoning and blessing you. Try to learn this lesson. If you cannot understand how it can be so, rest on God's declaration that it is so. It can be explained. We can find a reason for it all in the incarnation, and sufferings, and righteousness, and continual intercession, of the Lord Jesus Christ. But wait for no explanation. God has told you, plainly told you, that he is ready to blot out all your transgressions for his own name's

sake. Take him then on his own terms. Ask him for his mercy for his name's sake. Cry out with the psalmist, "O remember not against us our former iniquities. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name. Deliver and purge away our sins for thy name's sake."

This is a plea, brethren, we may all use. It is a plea which suits us all. It requires no worthiness in any of us to qualify us to make use of it. All it requires is, that we should acknowledge and feel our unworthiness and be content to owe our pardon and salvation entirely to God's free goodness through Jesus Christ his Son. It is a plea too which he himself puts, as it were, into our lips: we could never have thought of it, if his gospel had not taught it us. There is no possibility then of such a plea being rejected. The man who is led to urge it, has been instructed by God himself to urge it; his Holy Spirit has given birth to it in that man's heart. It is in itself an evidence, if any were wanting, that God has mercy in store for him; and were he the most sinful of us all, were he the very guiltiest transgressor on the earth's surface, there is as surely mercy in God for him and plenteous mercy, if he will but seek it, as there is water in the ocean or light in the sun.

SERMON XIX.

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

CHRIST TEMPTED IN THE WILDERNESS.

ST. MATTHEW IV. 1.—"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

WE must not suppose that our Lord had never been tempted before, or that Satan never tempted him again after this time. It is probable that he was exposed to his attacks all his life long, just as we are. But this was perhaps a more severe and

trying assault than usual, or it may have been recorded because it is more especially calculated to afford us instruction. It is instruction we must seek in it; useful, practical instruction. May the great Teacher of the church vouchsafe to impart it to us!

It is not my intention to lead you through the whole history. The circumstances mentioned in the text we shall find sufficient for our present meditation. They are four.

I. Notice *the Person tempted*. It was Jesus, the holy One of God; clearly the very last Being in existence, whom we should have supposed Satan at all likely to tempt.

See here then *the depth of our Lord's abasement*. We think it a great thing for him to stoop down from the eternal heavens to the manger at Bethlehem, and so it was; none but he himself could tell how great; but this was only the beginning of his degradation. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself." We must recollect that he is the holiest Being in the universe, as well as the greatest. So holy is he, that "the heavens," we are told, "are not clean in his sight," and he charges his angels, his own spotless angels, with folly. To stand therefore side by side with this base fallen spirit; to suffer himself to be led hither and thither at his will; to allow it to be supposed for one moment by any one creature, that he who could never tolerate sin, could himself be prevailed on to commit it; to bear the vilest of all creatures to say to him, "Be like me," nay, "Fall down and worship me"—O what must the holy Saviour have felt in such an hour as this? This was indeed abasement. It was not to lay aside his majesty, but to have dishonour done to something he values more—to have the glory of his holiness concealed and questioned.

See here also *the height of his love*. We may discover this in the depth of his abasement. Whatever he submitted to, he submitted to for our sakes. He became in the first instance poor for us, and now for us he consents to be tempted.

And we must not think this cost him nothing. "He suffered, being tempted." With a soul like his, merely to dwell among sinners must have been bitter to him. Lot in Sodom was miserable. He "vexed his righteous soul," we are told, "day by day with the filthy conversation of the wicked." But here is something that goes far beyond this. Here is one unutterably

more righteous than Lot, not only dwelling among the pollution he abhors, but allowing the creature he most abhors, to tempt him into pollution. And wherefore did he bear this? O the riches of his love! that in the time to come he might know how to comfort and succour his tempted people; that, as the man Christ Jesus, he might know, brethren, how at this moment to feel for some of you. "It behoved him," the Spirit says, "to be made in all things like unto his brethren; for in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." But further—

II. Notice *the part which God took in our Lord's temptation.* We must not overlook this. Each of the three evangelists who record the event, mentions it. "Then was Jesus," we read here, "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted." "The Spirit," St. Mark says, "driveth him into the wilderness." "Being full of the Holy Ghost," says Luke, "he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness."

It is clear from this language that God was in some way concerned in this transaction, and wishes us to know that he was. The question is, in what way was he concerned in it? And I answer, just as he afterwards was concerned in the Redeemer's crucifixion. It was his will that he should be crucified; he allowed it; he placed him in Jerusalem among men who, he knew, would crucify him, and when there, he gave him up into their hands. So here. It was his will that he should be tempted, and how does he act? He not only says to the powers of darkness, "There in that world where you have so often triumphed, there in that kingdom of yours, is my beloved Son, and you may try him as you will;" but he appoints, as it were, a place and hour for his trial; he places him in a situation that laid him specially open to temptation. "The conflict shall take place," he says, "and I will bring to the scene of it my holy Son."

And just so the Lord deals with all his sons. He himself never tempts them to evil, but he allows them to be tempted to evil by others; and more than this—he leads them into circumstances wherein he knows they will inevitably be tempted. If we enquire as to our duty in this matter, it is plain. It is to keep as far from evil as we can. Our Master teaches us this, when he bids us pray, "Lead us not into temptation." If we

go into temptation, we are to be carried, or rather, like Christ, to be driven into it, and that by God. But when there, we have this thought to comfort us, "It is my God who has brought me here. I see evil approaching me. Would that I could get away from it! My soul dreads and abhors it. I do indeed suffer under it. What would I not give to escape it? But it is my Father's will that it should assail me. He has sent me here into this battle-field, and as long as it pleases him, I must stay and fight in it."

None but the godly man can tell the comfort there is in having another to guide us in all things. "Led by the Spirit"—this is not only safe, it is pleasant to the soul. The consciousness that it is led by him, gives strength and courage to the soul in the hour of conflict. "There," says the general to his soldiers, "mount that breach and scale that wall." The men will do it with a shout, with a glistening eye and a firm tread; and why? They have their general's command. They would have deemed themselves madmen to have moved a step without it.

III. Mark now *the time of our Lord's temptation*.

This also is particularly pointed out in every one of the narratives. We shall find in it two circumstances to notice.

1. *It was immediately after God had put on him especial honour.* "Then," says the text, "was Jesus led up into the wilderness"—when? By referring to the foregoing chapter, we see that it was directly after the heavens had been opened, and a voice from heaven had said, "This is my beloved Son." And turn to St. Mark. He also speaks of this voice, and then, in the very next verse, he says, "Immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness." And St. Luke also gives the same account; "He returned from Jordan," where he had been so honoured, "and was led into the wilderness."

Now it may seem strange to us, on the first view, that Satan should choose an hour like this for his great attack on Christ; but Satan had often attacked others in such hours, and successfully. When did Noah fall? When did Lot fall? On the very days in which God had delivered and honoured them. The enemy took them in the thick of their mercies, in the first glow of their gratitude and joy, and laid them low. And Paul too is attacked at a similar time, though not mastered. God

lifts him up one hour into the third heaven; the next, there is a messenger from Satan buffeting him.

See then, brethren, what you are to expect. If God at any time is pleased to give you some peculiar discovery of his love, look out for your enemy. There is probably some bitter temptation now at hand for you; and the Lord may have sent you that mercy to strengthen you for that trial. He prepares his people for honour by first abasing them, and it is his way also to prepare them for conflict by refreshments and consolations. Besides, Satan knows that signal mercies bring signal dangers with them. Few of us can bear them without being puffed up by them, or taken up by them. We forget in the joy they give us, where we are. The sun shines, and we think it will shine for ever; we prepare no more for the hurricane and the storm. It was so with David; "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." And when it is so with us, "Now," says Satan, "is my hour; now for a triumph." He cares not how many mercies or joys a believer has, so that he can but find him self-confident and secure.

But we must look forward as well as backward.

2. Our Lord was tempted, observe again, *just before he entered on his great ministerial work*. As long as he abode quietly at Nazareth, we read not of any attack on him; but the instant he comes into public and is about to begin his ministry, there is Satan by his side.

And if any thing, brethren, will keep the great tempter near you, it is his seeing that God has set you apart for some signal service, and that you are girding up your loins to enter on it. We wonder that this or that servant of God is so much assailed, has so much internal conflict to bear, and is so ill treated and reviled in the world. In almost every case, we shall find that the man is doing much for God or attempting much; at all events, that he is decided for God. Satan attacks him, because Satan fears him. Take the man whom the world commends and admires, with whom the assaults of the tempter are matters of mere speculation or belief, not of experience;—we can tell at once, that that man will never storm the battlements of hell; that he is not the man for the breach or the onset. He is let alone, because he is on the tempter's side; or if not so, he is half-hearted, and "That," says the tempter, "will do for me as well." We who are ministers, see and feel enough of this.

Pray for us, brethren—for those of us, who are decided on God's part and are facing the enemy, that we may not be high-minded but fear; and for those of us, who are never attacked by Satan and the world, that we may look to ourselves, and ask, "How is this? Why do those who so persecuted my Master, so smile on me?"

And just observe how a mighty God brings good out of evil; how he makes Satan work against himself. "There is a servant of the living God," says that evil one. "He is buckling on his armour and drawing out his sword. I will assault him while he is young in the war, and scarcely looks for a foe." He does so; and what follows? He may give the man a wound, but his very assaults help to qualify the man for his Master's work. The conflict teaches him the art of war. He learns from it the way to victory. It makes him feel, as nothing but painful experience can, his own weakness; and it brings him acquainted, as nothing but blessed experience can, with his Saviour's strength. A foundation is laid by it for deeper humility and self-abasement, and that constant going out of ourselves to Christ, that leaning on Christ, which can fit us for any thing. The Captain of our salvation was prepared for his work partly in this wilderness. If I may dare so to speak, Satan instructed him while he tempted him. And so is it with every one of his soldiers. All hell may put forth its power against them, but every effort it makes against them, shall in some way or other be overruled for their good and Jehovah's honour. This song shall at last end the whole matter, "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

IV. There is only one circumstance more in the text to be noticed, and that is *the place where the Lord Jesus was tempted*. It was in the wilderness; and not there accidentally: God chose this as the scene of his temptation. And he intends us to mark that he did so, for here again he causes all the evangelists to mention the circumstance. And what was this wilderness? It was a place of solitude. Our Lord appears to have been perfectly alone in it. Hereby then we are taught that solitude is not necessarily safety; that we do not get out of Satan's reach when we get out of the world's.

If there is any one thing that some of us need, it is retire-

ment. We are living in a neighbourhood and are engaged in concerns which leave us but little time for this, and in many cases less inclination. For want of this, the souls of some of us are half-starved. We know little of our own hearts, little of our Bibles, little of our God. And the case will never be better with us, till we are brought to say, "I will live less in a crowd. This craving world shall have less of my time and thoughts. No day shall pass over me, but I will spend some part of it alone." We may not yet have found it out, but it is a fact—solitude is as needful for every Christian man, as public ordinances or public prayer. And this, I conceive, we are taught by our Lord's example. "There will be enough of communion with God for thee, O blessed Jesus," we might have said to him, "when thy work is done. Think of a suffering and perishing world. None can help it as thou canst. O give thyself up to it. Spare it all thy strength and powers." But what is his answer? He begins his ministry with forty days of solitude, and in his most active seasons he spends hours, yea, whole nights alone.

But while all this is true, something else is true—solitude is dangerous to us as well as necessary. A man must not say when he gets alone for an hour, "I have shut out the world, and am now for a little while safe." He may have shut out the world; but there is a worse enemy to his soul, if possible, than the world, and there is no shutting of him out. He is a spirit, and as such he laughs at bolts and bars. Go where we will, he follows us. Be where we may, he cleaves to us. Like God himself, he is about our bed, and about our path, and spieth out all our ways.

But worse still, it seems to be Satan's way to be especially near us, when no one else is near us. As long as we are moving about in the world, he leaves the world to do his work for him. "I may let them alone now," he says: "there is enough there without me to ensnare and pollute them." But when we get alone, we get out of the reach of his worldly ministers and instruments; and the consequence is, he comes and supplies their place. We have to wrestle now, not against flesh and blood, our fellow-men, but against principalities and powers, mighty angels. We are in danger not from enemies that we can see and understand, but from enemies that we never see, that we cannot understand, that are as subtle and strong, as we are foolish and weak. Where, brethren, have some of you borne

the severest conflicts? And where have you sustained the most sad defeats? You will say, "In our chambers; on our beds; alone. The world, by God's help, we can generally master; but these unseen enemies that come to us when alone, that tamper with our polluted imaginations, and our roving, discontented, rebellious hearts—they are our deadliest foes." Noah stood upright in a world overrun with wickedness; he fell when that world was destroyed, in his own solitary tent. All the vile men in Sodom could not corrupt Lot, but Satan met him on one of the lonely mountains of Zoar, and there brought him down.

And here we must stop. The main thing we are to learn from what we have heard, is this—to look more on the now exalted Jesus as the once tempted Jesus.

You remember the apostle's prayer for the Ephesians—it was for this among other things, that they might "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." And how is this love to be known? Chiefly by our contemplating one by one the various manifestations of it he made in his flesh. His wonderful incarnation and his bitter death strike us at once, for we see at once our own interest in them, and the immense sacrifice they cost him; but to be tempted, to hold intercourse with unclean spirits, to walk the same earth with them, to bear, whenever they chose to make them, their vile attacks—this does not at once arrest us, but here was in reality a no less amazing display of the Redeemer's love. The early church evidently thought so, for it set apart a long season in every year to commemorate it; and the fathers of our own church thought the same, for they have done the same. These things are not superstitions, they are not mistakes. They had their origin in a right understanding of gospel-truth, and an ardent love for our blessed Lord. Learn, brethren, as these holy men of old learnt, to study his character in every discovery and manifestation of it. Think of him in the wilderness, as well as in the manger and on the cross. Set him often before you as your tempted Lord. You may not at once see the importance of so regarding him, but as you grow better acquainted with the way to heaven, you will do more than see, you will feel it. There is many a conflict for you before you are at your journey's end. If you are led at all by the Spirit, you will often be led by him into the wilderness of temptation; and it is easy to say what will be your main comfort there. It

will be to discover there the footsteps of your Saviour. Here in this gloomy desert my Master trod. Here the dark powers of hell troubled him, as they are now troubling me. Here he too suffered being tempted. And where is he now? He is a conqueror on a conqueror's throne. And what does he say to me in my sufferings and temptations? "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

SERMON XX.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE SIN OF ISAAC AND HIS FAMILY.

GENESIS XXVII. 12, 13.—"I shall bring a curse upon me and not a blessing. And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son."

THAT man must have a strange heart, who can read this chapter unmoved. A more touching narrative was never penned. It is however a very dark page of God's holy word. Sin and the punishment of sin fill the whole of it.

I. Look at *Isaac*.

His sin lay in aiming at a wrong object—he wanted to set aside the will of God.

The beginning of the chapter represents him to us bowed down with the infirmities of age, and as he himself supposes, drawing near to the grave. In this situation, he determines, like a prudent man, to settle at once an important worldly concern. This was the disposal of a peculiar blessing. It consisted partly in the ordinary birthright of eastern families, comprehending a title to a double portion of the father's property and a limited authority over his other children, and partly, in this case, certain special privileges entailed by God on the seed of

Abraham. These Isaac had inherited from his father, and, according to the usages of the east, they would naturally have descended to Esau his first-born; but God, in his sovereignty, had interposed and ordered it otherwise. He had determined that the birthright and all which appertained to it, should go to Jacob, the younger son; and he made this determination known. Before the children were born, he said to Rebekah, "The elder shall serve the younger."

We can hardly suppose that Isaac had forgotten this. The truth seems to be, that he did not approve of it. It militated against established custom and against his own parental feelings; and we find him, in the chapter before us, attempting to set it aside. He calls Esau, his eldest son, to him, and bids him prepare to receive from his dying hands the precious blessing.

Here then is laid bare the root of all the mischief this chapter details. It was a flying out on Isaac's part against the divine sovereignty; it was an effort to frustrate the declared will of God; and this not in an ungodly man, not in one just brought for the first time to Jehovah's feet, but in the aged and pious Isaac, the son of Abraham; in one who had known God and served God more than a hundred years. There is nothing more difficult, brethren, than for a man to say in good earnest to the Lord, "Thy will be done." Nothing is more common even among his own servants, than efforts to thwart and overrule his will. But to what do these efforts come? This history tells us.

Mark *the punishment of Isaac*. It was two-fold.

First, his object was defeated—Esau lost the blessing. And man will always be defeated, when man struggles with his Maker. Success may appear certain, failure impossible. He may be allowed to go on till he almost wonders at his own boldness and God's passiveness; his hand may touch and well nigh grasp the forbidden object; but, "My counsel shall stand," says Jehovah, "and I will do all my pleasure." He vindicates his authority in an unexpected moment and by unexpected means, and then where and what are we? Our schemes, and efforts, and hopes, are all laid low; and worse than this—they are all turned against ourselves. We meant to triumph over God, but, before we are aware, God has triumphed over us. "I will pursue, I will overtake," said the haughty Pharaoh, "I will divide the spoil." He did pursue, he did overtake, and there

stands helpless Israel before him in appearance his certain prey ; but look again—that prey is rescued, and there roll the billows of the Red Sea over that proud Egyptian and his thundering hosts. The Lord “blew with his wind, the sea covered them : they sank like lead in the mighty waters.”

And so was it here ; for notice another part of Isaac’s punishment—not only was his object defeated, but in aiming at it, he brought much sin on his family and much anguish on himself.

Nothing comes home perhaps more keenly to a husband’s or a father’s heart, than deception in those he loves, and more especially deception which is practised on himself. It sticks fast in the memory, it stings in the soul. And this was Isaac’s portion. An insulted God did not at once speak to him from heaven, and say, “This thing must not be ; Esau must not have that blessing :” he suffered sin in him to lead to sin in Rebekah and Jacob, and then when that sin is consummated, he turns to the aged patriarch and discovers it to him. He shews him in the same moment the failure of his hopes for Esau, and the treachery of his wife and son.

And observe the effect of this discovery on him. “Isaac,” we are told, “trembled very exceedingly.” It was natural he should do so. Such a shock must have been terrible to him. Indignation at the imposition practised on him ; so much sin committed by those so very dear to him ; the precious birthright lost to his beloved first-born : and then after a while considerations of another nature—his own daring attempt to counteract God : the evident and awful way in which God had turned that attempt back on himself ; a discovery of the folly, and self-will, and rebellion, still remaining in his own aged heart ;—all these things must have rushed in on his mind in quick succession, and harrowed it up with the keenest sorrow.

Brethren, you and I must expect misery as well as defeat, when we oppose the will of God. The Bible says, “Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker,” and we must calculate on finding the saying true. It is not the mere loss of the desired object, that sin brings on us ; its fruit, to the child of God, is shame, and humiliation, and anguish. It is the bitter tear and the secret groan. It is the oppressed conscience and the troubled heart. It is restlessness in prosperity, darkness in trouble, and sometimes a thicker darkness in death. To be happy in Christ, we must be holy in Christ. We must draw submission, self-

denial, prostration of mind, from his Spirit, as well as pardon from his blood.

II. We may turn now to *Rebekah*.

Her sin was altogether different in its character from Isaac's. It consisted in aiming at a right object by sinful means.

She well knew it was the divine will that her younger son should inherit the blessing. God had told her so. In this arrangement, she perfectly acquiesced. Her feelings went with it. While Esau, by his active, manly, and in some respects useful habits, had ingratiated himself with his father, Jacob, it seems, domestic and affectionate in his character, had become her favourite; "*Rebekah loved Jacob.*" Besides, her judgment must in this case have taken part with her feelings on God's side. It was clear that her favourite son was far more deserving of the blessing, than his reckless brother. But here is a trial for her—that blessing seems about to be snatched from him. Isaac is determined to give it Esau, and in an hour or two Esau is coming to receive it.

Now we know what in such a situation strong faith would have said—"I must go to that old man's side; I must remind him of the will of Jehovah; I must beseech him, with all the earnestness of my soul, not to sin thus against God. And when I have done this, I must be quiet; I must leave the matter in God's own hands. He has promised the blessing to Jacob, and though Esau were now kneeling by his father's bed, that promise shall be fulfilled; the blessing shall be Jacob's." But this exercise of faith was too much for this weak mother. She looked at probabilities and circumstances, and, afraid to leave the matter to God, she takes the management of it on herself. First comes distrust of God, and then come fraud and deceit. Here lay her error, here lay her sin, in thinking that with such vile things as these she could further the purposes of a holy God. Her object was good; her motive was good; what could be better? Her object, she would doubtless have said, was to bring about the divine will, and, in doing so, to keep her husband from a daring act of disobedience; her motive, a wish to preserve the blessing of God for one to whom God had promised to give it—her own affectionate, dutiful, pious son. If there was ever a case in which crooked means seemed allowable or excusable, it was this. But God, brethren, will not bear with these things. He has

given us a law, and no matter what our circumstances may be, he requires us to obey it. We may say that we may prevent much evil or do much good by a slight transgression of it, and God in his omnipotence may overrule that transgression, as he overrules all things, to further his own holy purposes, but sin lies at our door; that act of ours is displeasing and hateful to him, as much so as though nothing but evil came from it. He sees in it a contempt of his authority, and a making light of his holiness.

We talk sometimes of our motives. Alas! there is no bad thing which has not been done from what men have^{sc} called a good motive and really thought one. Look at the unconverted Paul. What carried him along in his career of persecution and cruelty? "I verily thought," he says, "that I did God service." And what brought about at last that most awful of all man's awful crimes, the crucifixion of the Son of God? Good motives still. "It is expedient that one man should die for the people," said Caiaphas. "There will be a tumult if I do not condemn this innocent man," said Pilate. And had those savage Jews been asked why they cried out for his condemnation, there was not perhaps one among them, who would not have said, "The honour of the God of Israel requires it." God did indeed glorify himself in his death, but that miserable people discovered at length that a sin heavier than they could bear rested on their heads. A man of God soon learns to be afraid of his motives. He is afraid of every thing that has its origin in his own corrupt heart. He looks out of himself for the rule of his actions; he turns to the divine law; he reads the plain commands of a holy God and says, "I must obey them. I must, and by God's help I will, order my life by them. I will listen to no carnal suggestions; I will break through all ensnaring reasonings. I will not ask when thinking of any measure, What will come out of it? will it do good or harm? I will first ask, Is it right or wrong? I will bring it if I can to the standard of God's law, and if that condemns it, I will cast it aside. It is one of the works of darkness, and I will never employ it in the service of a God of purity and light."

The punishment of Rebekah may appear slight, and yet to a fond mother like her, it must have been deeply painful. The curse was indeed on her, and it came in a form she little anticipated—she lost the son for whom she had plotted and sinned.

Indignant at the wrong done him, Esau resolves to revenge himself on his brother, and to screen Jacob from his violence, Rebekah is obliged to send him into a distant land. It appears certain that for more than twenty years afterwards, she never saw him; the probability is, that she never saw him again. And what has she at home to comfort her? A deceived, injured husband, an irritated, resentful son. How often in her lonely musings must she have mourned over her folly, and wondered that she had not discovered sooner the righteousness of her God!

Her example speaks plainly and solemnly also to all who are parents amongst us. It tells us that children are easily led into sin. Deceit and falsehood are bound up in the heart of every child that breathes, and it is as easy to call them into action as to get their tongues to speak or their feet to move. It is easy also to find motives that seem good, for prompting the lie, or sanctioning the lie, or concealing the lie; but as surely as there is a God living in heaven, the evil we prompt or encourage or tolerate in our children, will come down in the end on our own heads. The curse of it will be on us. The blow may at first strike others, but in the end it will recoil on ourselves. Our poor children may themselves sting us to the quick; or if not so, the hand of God may be on them. We may see in their undoing at once our own punishment and our own sin.

III. Let us turn now to *Jacob*.

The instant we look at him, we are struck with this fact, that the nearer a man is to God, the more God is displeased with any iniquity he sees in him, and the more openly and severely he punishes it. Of all this family, Jacob was the most beloved by him, but yet, as far as regards this world, he appears to have suffered from this transaction the most bitterly.

His sin was of a complicated character. To a hasty observer, it might appear light. Certainly much might be said in palliation of it. He was not first in the transgression. The idea of it did not originate with him. His feelings revolted at it when it was proposed to him. He shrunk from it. He remonstrated against it. Besides, it was a parent who urged him on, a fond and tender mother. And we must remember too that all those motives which led Rebekah to form this plot, would operate also in Jacob's mind to lead him to execute it. It was furthering the will of God, it was saving a father from sin. "The

object is good," he might say, "and is not my motive good?" He accordingly falls in with the scheme, and Satan carries him through it. One sin makes way for another; one sin impels him to commit another. Falsehood comes after falsehood in quick succession, till at last, with a fearful hardihood, he employs the name of God himself to aid his deceit.

Let young persons see here what a single deviation from truth can do. In one short hour, it made the pious Jacob appear and act like one of the worst of men. It is just as able to debase you. God has put a special curse on this thing. All sin entangles, but none like falsehood. There is hardly any escape from it. To fall into it is like getting on a slippery declivity—we know not when or where we shall stop. No matter who instigates you to this sin, no matter what good end is to be answered by it, you are no more justified in practising it, than in committing theft or murder. The crime may not be as great, but it is a crime equally forbidden by God, and his indignation against it is as sure.

Beware too of trifling with conscience. Jacob was not blind to the criminality of the act he was committing. He speaks only of the danger of it, but it is very evident that there was something within him, which told him of its guilt. "I shall bring a curse on me and not a blessing"—when conscience says that to you, stand still. You are getting into some dangerous path. Listen no more to the voice that calls you on; look not at the pleasure or profit that you expect to arrive at. Turn back. Betake yourselves to prayer. Conscience is a poor guide, but it is a perilous thing to go any where without its sanction; it is a fearful thing to wound it by entering on any course it condemns.

Again: have you an affectionate heart? Then watch over it. Such a heart Jacob had. It was one great beauty of his natural character, and it was also one of his greatest snares. He owed to it all through life much of his sin and much of his suffering. To this source, I conceive, his crime on this occasion may be traced. He can hardly be thought a selfish man. If left alone, he would never perhaps have practised deceit to aggrandize himself. No; his mother's fondness had laid a strong hold of his affection, and he consequently did not know how to resist her persuasions or give her pain. It might be too that her society and indulgence had done him harm. While they kept

alive and strengthened his feelings, they had probably weakened his principles. If we have a heart like his, we are not to crush it, we are not to harden it or attempt to harden it, but we must watch it. It is a dangerous thing to carry about with us in such a world as this. Every man has need to keep his heart and "with all diligence" too, but of all men, he has the most need to keep it, who has a heart that can feel and love, and endure almost any thing itself, rather than let another bear a pain. Such a heart has only to be prayerless or careless for a while, and it will bleed with some unlooked for and perhaps long lasting wound.

As for *the punishment* of Jacob's sin, we must read the history of his life to see the extent of it. It followed him almost to his dying hour.

He was successful in his treachery; it obtained from his deceived father the desired birthright: but what fruit had he from his success? We might say, none at all, or rather he sowed the wind and he reaped the whirlwind. His fears were realized; he did bring a curse on him and not a blessing. In the first instance, he becomes an outcast from his home and country. He then endures hardships in Laban's service, to which he had before been a stranger. And when he began to think perhaps that the indignation of the Lord against him was spent, an imposition was practised on him, which must have brought his sin with all its bitterness anew into his mind—he labours seven years for Rachel, and in the hour when he thinks she is his own, he discovers that she is not his own; another has been palmed on him in her stead. He becomes at last a parent, and then God speaks out. Mischief springs up in his own family. Deception follows deception there, blow succeeds to blow on that poor sufferer's head, till his grey hairs are well nigh brought down with sorrow to the grave. For more than fifty years he reaped the bitter fruits of this one sin. Mercy indeed did not forsake him. The Lord was with him all the way he went, and blessed him; but while with one hand he poured out blessings on him, with the other he scourged him. And this, brethren, was a man of God, a contrite, praying, pardoned sinner. Where will your sins bring you if they are never pardoned, if you live and die in your transgressions? One sin, one pardoned sin, pardoned as regards eternity, tinged the whole of Jacob's life with misery—consider that

fact, and then ask yourselves whether sin is not a greater evil in God's sight than you ever thought it. Pray that you may not have to learn its fearfulness for the first time in a future world.

IV. We come now to the case of *Esau*.

As we read the narrative of the treachery practised against him and his affecting conduct under it, we are ready perhaps to regard him as an injured rather than a guilty man. We look in vain for any sin committed by him; we can see in him much to pity and nothing to blame. But there is a scene in the past history of this man, which throws a new light on this transaction. We have only to turn to it, and we see at once, in his bitter disappointment, the fruit of transgression, the just though tardy indignation of a holy God.

According to the custom of the east, the birthright of his family was originally Esau's. He regarded it as his own. Now turn to the twenty-fifth chapter of this book, and see what value he set on it. We soon see that he set no value at all on it. Alive to the present and reckless of the future, he preferred to it the momentary gratification of a sensual appetite. "What profit," he said, "shall this birthright do to me?" and then he threw it away to his brother Jacob for a mess of pottage. "For one morsel of meat," St. Paul says, "he sold his birthright;" and for this act he brands him as "profane." It would have been a rash act if his father's lands and flocks had been all this birthright contained, but there were divine blessings included in it; and here was a treating of those blessings and of the God who was the giver of them, with contempt. "He despised his birthright"—that was his sin; he lost his birthright—that was his punishment; and it was a just punishment; he only lost that on which he set no value. Base were the means employed at this time by Rebekah and his brother to secure it from him, but how much more base must that heart have been, which could at any time have so willingly parted with such a treasure? O that his baseness were not so true a picture of our own!

We too have a birthright, one so precious that houses and lands, all the silver and gold the earth contains, are as dross in comparison with it. There are blessings held out to every one of us, blessings put at this moment within our reach, which ought to make the heart of every one here burn as he hears of

them—the pardon of sin, reconciliation with heaven, adoption into God's family, everlasting life and blessedness in his presence; not Canaan, not a land flowing with milk and honey on earth, but a kingdom in heaven, a world bright with the glory of an incarnate God and overflowing with his joy. And how are we treating this birthright? How are we acting with reference to these blessings? Many of us are selling them for nought; forgetting, undervaluing, despising them; suffering the business and cares and vexations of life, its short-lived, paltry pleasures, to rob us of them all.

Look, brethren, at Esau's feelings when the man at last came to himself. The blessing was gone, irrecoverably gone; his father told him so; and then, says the history, "when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father." And then again, "Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept." And what was the result of all this weeping and supplication? "Ye know," says St. Paul, "how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

Need I remind you, brethren, of another scene of weeping and wailing, of bitterness and despair? O may a God of mercy grant that you may tremble as you think of it; that you may seek, and seek at once, in a great and willing Saviour, deliverance from its woes! The God we have been contemplating to-day as a God of judgment, is also a God of grace; of grace so abundant, that he is ready to blot out for ever the iniquity he hates, yea, the iniquity which for a while he punishes. He pardoned Isaac, he pardoned Jacob, pardoned them even while chastising them. They are now as happy in heaven and as pure, as heaven can make them. He has made known a way by which he can as completely pardon, deliver, and eternally bless you. And what does he ask at your hands in order to obtain this pardon and this salvation? Tears, and repentance, and efforts? All these will come, will assuredly come with these mercies, but for the obtaining of these mercies, he asks—what? Shall I say, nothing? He himself says, nothing. He says indeed one minute, "He that believeth, shall be saved," but what does he say the next?

"Come and take my salvation freely. It is as water to the man perishing in the desert; it is refreshing as wine and milk to the fainting traveller; but whosoever will, let him take it, take it without money and without price."

One word to you, brethren, who know the value of this birth-right, who have sought and obtained an interest in its promises. This history reminds you of the real character of the world you are living in; it is a tempting, ensnaring, treacherous world. It reminds you too of the real character of your own hearts. If they are not profane like Esau's, they are as self-willed as Isaac's, as distrustful as Rebekah's, as weak, as false, as little able to withstand temptation, as Jacob's. You see here also the real character of God. This history tells you that he is a holy God, so holy that he will not pass over a single act of sin even in his dearest saints. You feel as you read it, that he would not suffer the highest angel in heaven to trifle with him. And what is the conclusion to which you are to come? "Let others be light-hearted, we must pray. Let others boast, we must fear. We must cleave to Christ, our Saviour, as though heaven and hell depended on our holding him fast."

SERMON XXI.

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

JACOB AT BETHEL.

GENESIS XXVIII. 16, 17.—"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place. and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

THE discoveries God made of himself to his servants of old, were not intended for them only; his servants in all ages have an interest in them. Were it not so, he would never have recorded them for us in his everlasting word. Do we read

there that he appeared in a flame of fire to Moses in the wilderness, and to Isaiah on a throne of majesty in the temple? For our sakes, we may say, did that flame burn, and for us was that high throne lifted up. And the same in this case. There rests on his pillow of stones the sleeping Jacob, but the same eye that is watching him, is looking at the same moment far beyond him. It is penetrating into future ages. It sees other travellers struggling along one after another the wearisome road appointed them; and "The vision," says God, "wherewith I will comfort Jacob, shall be for their comfort also. The remembrance of it shall not pass away. I will speak to my troubled people by it through all generations." May he speak, and speak effectually, by it from his holy place this day to you!

I. The first circumstance we must notice, is *the time when this discovery of God to Jacob was made.*

It was in *a season of distress.*

Intervening years may have dimmed the memory of it, but some of us can still recollect the hour when we first left our father's house, and found ourselves in a strange world alone. Our feelings in that hour were probably sorrowful feelings. They were Jacob's now. He had just left his father's house, or rather had been driven from it, and here he is, at the close of his first day's journey, without a friend or a home. A town indeed is near, where he may find a lodging, but too sick at heart probably to mingle with the crowd of it, he stops outside it, and makes the open air his lodging. "He took," we read, "of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep." But here, in the stillness of the night, comes One and breaks in on his solitude. "That poor outcast shall not lie there alone," says God. "My angels shall go down to him; yea, I myself will go, and I will comfort him." Then Jacob dreams, and the Lord is revealed to him.

It is a blessed loneliness, brethren, that brings God near us; and it is a happy affliction, that discovers him to us. You complain perhaps that he is never visible to you; that you have been longing for years to get a sight of him as your God, and have never had one. And what sight of him had Jacob while at home and at ease? We read of none. It is when he enters on a path of tribulation, that he meets his God; and when God leads you into such a path, he will meet you in it. Sometimes,

as here, he manifests himself to his people at the beginning of their affliction; at other times, as in Job's case, not till the close of it; but it matters not—he is with his people all through their affliction, from the beginning to the end of it, and before they are out of it, they generally see his face.

This vision, observe also, was sent to Jacob *just after he had fallen into a grievous sin*. A few days only had passed since he had cruelly deceived his father by imposing himself on him for Esau. He was now flying from Esau's resentment. And bitter indeed at this hour must have been his feelings. "This is my own work," he must have said. "This banishment from all on earth that is dear to me, I could bear, did it come upon me without any fault of mine; but to lie here in this wretchedness of my own creating, and to think as I lie here of the injured brother I have left behind me, and the fond mother I may never see again, and my kind-hearted, indulgent, forgiving father, in whose dying pillow I have planted so many thorns—O wretch that I am, how can I bear this? Where can I turn for consolation? How can I ever know peace again? Those stars above me seem peaceful as ever. They shine the same as when I gazed on them from Beersheba beside my herds and flocks; but O how changed am I!" But see the abundance of Jehovah's mercy. Sin generally separates between us and God. Though walking before in the light of his countenance, it rises up as a cloud before us, and hides him from our sight. It is not in sin, it is in self-denial, and obedience, and active service, that he commonly reveals himself to his people. On earth, as in heaven, when his servants serve him, they see his face. But he is a sovereign God and a marvellously gracious God; and sometimes, in the majesty of his sovereignty and to lay open to us the unthought of riches of his grace, he will pass by for a moment the servant who is serving him, and cause his face to shine on some unworthy transgressor; not indeed in his transgression, but when he begins to feel the smart of his transgression, and his heart is breaking. The elder brother in the parable is in appearance forgotten; there runs the father to meet and embrace the wretched younger one.

We know not, brethren, the freeness of that love which God bears to the penitent. Its freeness does not shew itself in words and promises only, it is to be seen in his ways. What was there in Jacob at this time to draw forth any display of his love?

And yet this love does display itself. It comes forth as though it could not keep itself back; with a speediness and a tenderness which may well amaze us. In the first night of his trouble, this sinner is comforted, and the comfort he gets is a vision of Jehovah. This is like the singling out of the weeping Peter to receive the tidings of his Master's resurrection. "Tell all my disciples of it," says Christ, "but Peter especially. He is in bitterness of soul for denying me, and I am in haste to comfort him." And never is comfort, never is any mercy, so sweet to the soul, as the mercy that comes when we look for judgment. It is the torn heart, that feels the healing power of God's hand; it is the stricken heart, that understands what is meant by the tenderness of his love.

We may now take another view of this divine manifestation.

II. Consider *the ends to be answered by it.*

It consisted partly, you remember, of something seen by Jacob, and partly of something heard by him.

What he saw was a ladder communicating between the earth and heaven. "He dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it; and, behold, the Lord stood above it."

One design then of this vision certainly was, *to give Jacob at this time a lively impression of the presence and providence of God*, his universal presence and ever active providence.

Though not what we should now call a young man, yet we may fairly consider him as such, for having hitherto been living in the quiet of Isaac's family, he was altogether an inexperienced man; he was only just now, as we say, beginning the world, and becoming practically acquainted with its changes and troubles. His life too was to be a very eventful one. It was God's intention to lead him through many varied scenes, and some of them very trying and mysterious. His future comfort therefore and welfare required that he should have a peculiarly strong conviction of God's constant, universal presence and overruling providence.

And observe how the Lord expounds, as it were, this vision to him, and makes a particular application to him of the truth it shadows forth. He speaks as though that ladder were placed between heaven and earth for his sake only; as though it were

for him only that he kept watch above it. "Behold," he says, "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest. I will not leave thee." And thus the Lord reveals to us what we call his particular providence over his servants. Will any one deny this? Will any one say that an all-seeing, infinite God cannot watch over one of the creatures he has formed, more than another? We will not dispute the point. We will only say that this infinite God has promised to watch over us. Wherever we are, he declares that he sees us; he tells us he is with us; he assures us he cares for us; he pledges himself to keep us. We have his love and faithfulness to ensure his care of us, as well as his infinity and omniscience. "The eye of the Lord," we read, "is upon them that fear him;" it "runs" over others, it is fixed on them. He may fill all space with his presence, but "he encampeth," he says, "round about them that fear him." Where the lonely Jacob was, his God was. While Jacob sleeps, his God wakes and wakes for him; and "This God," we may say, "is our God for ever and ever. He that keepeth us, will not slumber."

But God had another design in this vision. It was intended *to renew and confirm to Jacob the promises he had given him.*

Some of us know well how far off sin can put a promise from us. Those very declarations of God, that were once a support and delight to us, it can make almost a terror. "We have nothing to do with them now," we say; "we have forfeited the blessings they speak of. It is painful to us to think of them." And such, we may conceive, were now Jacob's feelings. They must have been his feelings, if he thought at all seriously of his conduct and his situation.

Before he was born, the Lord had promised him the blessings of the birthright. He doubtless knew of this promise; but the unlawful means he had taken to secure its accomplishment, seemed to have for ever defeated it. There was Esau on the spot, ready as soon as his father should die to seize on the inheritance, while he was going as a fugitive into a distant land. And as for the higher and spiritual blessings of the birthright, how could he any longer hope for them? He, the treacherous deceiver of his own father, to be the father of a nation; and that nation, God's peculiar people on the earth! and the Messiah to come from him! and all the families of the earth to be blessed in him! "It cannot be," he must have thought.

“I said before I committed that crime, I shall bring a curse on me and not a blessing; and the curse is come. I am now an outcast. The God of my fathers has changed his purposes concerning me. Never will this land be mine. Never shall I even see it again. No holy Saviour can spring from me. Never shall any descendants of mine rise up and call me blessed. O what have I lost, and lost for ever! I shall go down to the grave a cast off, miserable man.” But what does that ladder say? “No, not cast off. Even in your guilt and misery, the Lord is looking on you, his angels have still a charge over you.” And what does God say when God speaks? Strange that it should be so, but he renews to this guilty man all the promises he had ever given him. Nothing, he says, had even yet been forfeited; no change had taken place in his sovereign purpose; no blessing Jacob had ever looked for, should be kept back. Canaan shall be his; “The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed.” A mighty nation shall spring from him; “Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south.” And, better than all, the world’s Saviour shall come from him; “In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” “And behold,” he adds, “I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” O marvellous grace! Four times over in narrating it does the sacred historian interpose the word “Behold,” as though he could not suppress his admiration. The mind however almost shrinks as it contemplates such grace as this. We can scarcely deem it real; and though real, we seem afraid to make any use of it. “It is grace,” we say, “that we must stand still and admire, not grace that we may encourage ourselves in.” But why is this grace exhibited to us? Why was this history written? Why is it lying open to-day before you and me? O brethren, here is exactly the grace which you and I want; and this history was written to let us see that there is this grace in the God we have sinned against, and in him for us. He is a magnificent God, glorious not only “in the greatness of his strength,” but in the splendour of his mercy; surpassing all our expectations in the one, as much as he rises above all our conceptions in the other. Look at him here. Neither the

efforts nor the sins of man can frustrate his purposes. "Jacob shall not have the promised blessing," says Isaac; "it shall go to Esau." "I shall turn it into a curse," says Jacob. But there on high sits the Lord God omnipotent, and what are Isaac's words or Jacob's fears to him? His purposes still stand fast as ever, and he will do all his pleasure. He lets old Isaac see that it is useless to strive against him; he opens the heavens and says to the guilty Jacob, "The blessing still is yours. I am with thee, and I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Will any one ask what becomes all this time of God's holiness? Let him read the history of Jacob through, and see. Never was there in any man's life a plainer exhibition of God's hatred of sin. He followed him almost to his dying day with his rod. While he forced him to sing of mercy, he almost broke his heart with his judgments. "Few and evil," said he in his old age, "have been my days." We must never be afraid, brethren, to look at God as God exhibits himself. It will be in the end no dangerous exhibition. We may let him lay bare his mercy as he pleases; he knows how to keep the contrite soul from abusing it; and where he most unveils his goodness, he will sooner or later unveil the most of his holiness. Think of the cross of Christ. Where does mercy shine forth in the splendour with which it shines there? and where at the same time does the justice and where the holiness of God appear so awful? And think of what men are. It is not any high conceptions of God's mercy, that they make us dread for them; it is their low conceptions of God altogether; their petty notions of all his perfections, and their strange, total blindness to his glory. Could we raise your view of one of his attributes, we should raise your view of all. The sight of his lofty mercy would soon open your eyes to a sight of his equally lofty holiness. You would never say, "We see too much of that mercy;" you would rather say, "We could not bear to see less. O that he would shew us more!"

III. But let us go on to notice *the effects produced on Jacob by this heavenly vision.*

The first of these was just what we might have expected—a *sense of God's presence*; a new, startling sense of it. "Surely," he said, "the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." And

again; "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

We all profess to believe in God's presence. Were we asked one by one at this moment whether God is here, we should unhesitatingly answer, Yes. We learnt this truth in our early childhood, and from that period to this we have never doubted it. But what place has it held in our minds all this time? What has been its influence and daily effect there? Many of us must acknowledge that it has existed in our minds as a mere notion, that it produces in us no effect at all. We have felt this day in this house of God as we should have felt if the God of this house were blind, or those doors had shut him out. Now, brethren, this wondering Jacob lets you see that there is a sense of God's presence, such as you have never experienced. It differs from that belief in it which you have, as much as a living thing differs from a dead one. It is active, impressive, powerful. It does not say, "God is here," and then leave the soul to feel as though he were away; it makes us feel as though we saw him here, and held converse with him.

And the way in which we get this sense of God's presence, is generally, as in this case, from some discovery of God's goodness to ourselves. No dream or vision of the night produces it, but God meets us, it may be, in an hour of affliction or sorrow, and makes such disclosures of his love to us, speaks such comfort to our hearts through the declarations of his word, or puts such strength into our hearts to bear our troubles, or sends us by his providence such unlooked for relief under them, that the soul can no more doubt his presence with it, than it can doubt its own existence. We feel his presence, and we feel it as a new thing. The church we are in, our house, our chamber, becomes to us as the house of God and the gate of heaven. O to understand more of this! O to walk through the world as though the Lord were walking through it by our side! In order to this, we must pray for brighter visions of his glory; we must seek a closer acquaintance with him; we must study his character more in the manifestation he has made of it in his gospel and in his Son.

This vision produced *fear* also in Jacob. "He was afraid," we read. "How dreadful," he said, "is this place!"

And yet why should Jacob fear? No spectacle of terror has been presented to him. No words of wrath have been addressed

to him. There has appeared no visionary mount Sinai flaming and shaking before him. All he has seen and heard has spoken to him of peace. We might have expected him as he waked to have sung with joy. What a change since he laid himself down on those stones to sleep! The evils he most dreaded, all averted; the mercies he mourned over as lost, all restored. Happy must his sleep have been, and happy now his waking! But not one word do we read here of happiness. The Holy Spirit tells us only of Jacob's fear. And why? To impress this truth on our minds, that the man who sees God, never trifles with him; that the soul he visits and gladdens with his mercy, he always fills with an awe of his majesty. Turn in this book to any manifestation of him you can find here—with hardly an exception, the man to whom it is made, trembles before him. When any effect produced by it is mentioned, fear is mentioned, or something allied to fear. Do you wonder at this, brethren? Do you want an explanation of it? Angels do not. The redeemed in heaven do not. The men on earth, who are really seeing God and rejoicing in his salvation, do not. "Fear," they say, "we do; fear we must; nay, fear we would. It is a happy fear that fills our hearts. There is no torment in it. Nothing painful gives birth to it. It springs from the nearness to us of the God who loves us; from the view we have of the power that blesses us; from the sight vouchsafed us of the holiness that bears with us; from the vastness we see, the length and breadth and depth and height, in the grace that saves us. Our fear comes not from the terrors of the Lord. Towards us he has laid all those terrors by. We have an Advocate with the Father; there is a Mediator between God and us, the Man Christ Jesus. We fear the Lord and his goodness. Our fear comes from the excellency of the Lord shining forth in the goodness of the Lord. It springs from the magnificence of that goodness. There is forgiveness with him, he tells us, that he may be feared; and we feel it must be so. If we rejoice at all, we must rejoice with trembling. Let those who are far from God, cast off the fear of God, we cannot; we are too near him. God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." Is this your language, brethren? Can you understand it? Then you understand what nothing but experience could explain to you. Your past visions of God's mercy have not been delusions.

They may be gone ; no more may be left to you of them, than was left to the waking Jacob of his dream ; you may be unable to recall them ; but this holy fear is left, and bless the God of all grace that it is. Those visions were sent to work it in you ; and there may it abide, a token of God's special favour to you, till it ends in the brighter vision and deeper fear of heaven.

Notice yet one effect more of this scene—*a desire in Jacob to render something to the God who had so visited him.* And this seems to have risen up in his mind as soon as he awoke, and to have been an exceedingly strong desire. There is nothing he can do now for God, but he sets up a memorial of God's loving kindness to him, and binds himself by a solemn purpose and vow to shew in the days that are to come, his thankfulness for it. He “rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.” “And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace ; then shall the Lord be my God ; and this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house ; and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee.” How this vow was performed, we need not now enquire. It is enough for our present purpose to observe that it was made, and made evidently in perfect sincerity and with much warmth of feeling. It teaches us this, that when we really see God, we long to be God's ; that when he sends us a visit of his love, it kindles our love ; that when he gladdens us with mercies and promises, we sometimes half forget our gladness in our desires to serve him. What is the end of all the mercy that he has ever shewn to man ? It is to bring man back to himself ; it is to lay him at his feet his willing servant ; it is to make us feel that we are not our own, but his. O brethren, if the sense we have of the redeeming love of Jehovah, if the discoveries we say he has made to us of his special love to ourselves, if these things have not led us to say, and to say it often, “What shall we render to the Lord ?” we are deceiving ourselves. We have never yet seen any thing at all of God's love. A dream from Satan has deluded us. We are yet in a dream and a treacherous one. May the Lord in his mercy awake us out of it !

Are any of us conscious that we have nothing to do with these things? Has this thought been to-day in any heart here, "What is this sermon to me? This gracious God is not mine. Would that he were!" Then let me add at the end of this sermon, one remark more—this vision seems to point out to you a way to God. It tells you where you may find him, and how you may approach him. We may regard it as in some measure typical of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is certainly referred to in the promise addressed to Jacob; and when he speaks in St. John's gospel of "the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man," he seems to have this ladder in his mind, and to view it as an emblem of himself. Just as that communicated between heaven and earth, so does he. Through him and him alone angels come down to us with blessings; through him mercy and grace descend; through him the Holy Spirit is given. He is the way also from earth to heaven. By him our prayers ascend up to the Father, and by him may we ourselves do the same. Far as we are from God, he can bring us nigh. High as the heavens are above the earth, he can raise us up to them. And he is willing to raise us up to them. That ladder may be climbed. Its top is in the utmost heavens; it rests on the throne of Jehovah; but its foot stands on the earth, and not on some distant, inaccessible mountain of it, but here by our side. Christ has opened for us a way to God, and there is not a sinner here, who may not this day enter it as freely as he may enter his own door. Through Christ we may seek God; through Christ we may find God; in Christ, looking up through his human to his lofty divine nature, we may see God, and see him as ours.

SERMON XXII.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

JACOB RETURNING TO BETHEL.

GENESIS XXXV. 1, 2, 3.—“ And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.”

THIS text does not preach the gospel to us, brethren, but God can make it preach very usefully to us. To those of us who are parents, it speaks home. May we feel its power, and we and our families be the better for it !

Let us consider, first, the state of Jacob's mind when this command from God came to him; then, the command itself; and then, the obedience which the patriarch rendered to it.

I. Jacob was now in a mournful *state of mind*, and yet a very common one.

You remember that when he was sent away from his father's house to avoid the resentment of Esau, God appeared to him in a vision on the first night of his flight, and promised to be with him all through his future life, and abundantly to bless him; to take care of him while absent from his native land, and eventually to bring him back to it again. Impressed with these promises given to him in so extraordinary a time and manner, Jacob rises up from the ground he was lying on, and taking the stone that had been his pillow, he sets it up for a pillar or memorial, and then, in the ardour of a holy gratitude, he vows a vow; he pledges himself in case the promises just given him

were fulfilled, to come back to the spot whereon he stood, and to make the very stone he had just set up, a house or altar to the Lord. Nearly thirty years had now passed. The Lord all this time had been with his servant and prospered him; he had brought him back at last to his country in peace. His vow is consequently due; but is it paid? Has Bethel been revisited? Is the promised altar built? No; for seven years Bethel and his vow seem to have been forgotten. During these years he has been living in another part of the land unmindful of both. How strange does this appear! And yet what is there uncommon in it? It involved in it only these two every-day things, forgetfulness of mercies and forgetfulness of vows.

Are *forgotten mercies* uncommon, brethren? Let any one of us look back a little, and he will say they are as common as forgotten sins. They meet us in every part of our life's history. As we trace it year by year from our infancy, we recollect perhaps many seasons in which God signally appeared for us, and affected our hearts by his great and unlooked for kindness. The feeling of gratitude excited at the time within us, was a deep and we thought it would be a lasting feeling. The tears of thankfulness were forced from our eyes, and words of praise from our lips. But where is the voice of praise now? It has long ago been silenced; the eye weeps and the heart burns no more. Our mercies remain, but our thankfulness is gone. Time has worn it away. We are no more like our former selves than this Jacob at Shalem was like Jacob at Bethel.

And something we know too of *forgotten vows*.

We were once poor perhaps in the world; just as this outcast Jacob was, almost pennyless; and just as he vowed, so did we. "If the Lord ever makes us rich, of all that he gives us, we will surely give a large portion back again to him." The Lord has made us rich; but money has brought with it the love of money, and the vows of our youth are as nothing. Where is the gold we promised to God? It is held fast in our own hands, and there we purpose to hold it.

Others of us perhaps can recollect the time when we were brought low by sickness, and thought ourselves near death; and what were our vows then? We remembered with bitterness our past follies, and determined, if our lives were spared, to devote all our future hours to God. Our lives were spared; we were raised from the bed of sickness; and for a season we

were thankful; but where is the devotedness we promised and purposed? Alas! we have scarcely once thought of it. Returning health brought with it our former worldly employments; the scenes of the world regained by degrees their former influence over us; we got once more into the whirl of every-day life, and the plans we formed in sickness for our conduct, were forgotten.

A few of us can look back to another season. We had lived regardless of God. It pleased him by his all-powerful Spirit to quicken our souls, and wake us up to a sense of our guilt and danger. For a time we suffered under the anguish of a wounded conscience; but at last we were enabled to look on a dying Saviour, and to regard his free and great salvation as our own. The Lord healed us; we felt the burden of sin taken off us; and we saw ourselves accepted in the Beloved. O with what a burning vow, brethren, did we then bind ourselves to the Lord! With what an energy of soul did we then resolve to live only unto him! "God is the Lord," we said, "which hath shewed us light; bind the sacrifice with cords even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art our God, and we will praise thee; thou art our God, we will exalt thee." But in what have these vows and resolutions ended? Where is the scene our happy minds then painted? We know not where to find it. We can bless God indeed for having in some measure changed us; we do not live the careless and sinful lives we did before; but as for having realized our purposes and expectations, as for being the zealous, holy, heavenly-minded men we determined to be, the thought is humiliating and painful to us. We feel that we have not gone up to Bethel as we said we would; we have not built the promised altar. We often wonder, not so much at our own forgetfulness of what we owe our redeeming God, as that he bears with us in our forgetfulness of it, and does not at once put us out of his covenant and cast us out of his sight.

This then was the state of Jacob's mind at this time. It was not a state of absolute forgetfulness of the Lord, for we see him, at the end of the thirty-third chapter, erecting at Shalem, near his tent, an altar to him; he was only forgetful of his early mercies and his early vows. And he shews us herein the exceeding deceitfulness of the human heart. If any one had told him at Bethel in the first glow of his thankfulness, in what it would end; if any one had said to him, "This is all well, that you

purpose; but this will all pass away; it will come to nothing"—would he have believed him? "No," he would have said, "you do not know me. Only let me be brought back to Canaan, and in a few days I will be here again at Bethel, this blessed Bethel. It shall be again to me as the house of God and the gate of heaven." But for seven years the man has been brought back to Canaan, and has never once been at Bethel. God shews us in him how little we can trust ourselves, how transient some of our best and warmest feelings are, and how easily effaced our deepest impressions. Here is another sermon on that declaration of Solomon, "He that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool."

II. Let us look now at *the command given to Jacob in his forgetfulness*. God said unto him, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." We learn here two things.

1. *The Lord remembers our promises and vows.*

We have sometimes been told that he remembers all his own mercies to his people, every act of his love towards every one of them. Here is a confirmation of that truth. After thirty years, the vision at Bethel, though but a vision, was fresh as ever in his memory. A mere dream of the night, sent by him to comfort one of the least of his servants, is not forgotten. This we can believe; but it is hard to believe that the Lord remembers the petty movements and workings of our minds. Men may recollect our promises, for they may build on them, and be led into disappointments and inconveniences if they are not performed; they may be large promises to creatures so small; but it is strange that the mighty God should hold in his mighty mind the promises of a worm. But hold them he does. He takes special notice of every word we utter, that has a reference to himself, and every purpose we form. He records the vows we make to him, and his mind dwells on them as though he delighted in them, and longed to have them fulfilled. "I remember thee," he says to his church of old, "the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." And turn to the thirty-first chapter of this book. There, seven years before this, he lets Jacob see that he remembers the kindness of his early years; "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the

pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me;" and here in the text he refers to the same transaction again. All this time he has been revolving it in his mind. Wonderful is the love that God bears to us! Its tenderness discovers itself in such seeming trifles as these. They let us see that all which befalls us, is of deep interest to him; that every service we render him or even purpose to render him, delights him. We take pleasure in any proofs we receive of our children's love towards us, but not such pleasure as he takes in any love of ours.

2. We learn here that *the Lord often reminds his people of their forgotten mercies and vows*. He did so in this case again and again. In Padan-aram, as we have seen, he tells his servant of the pillar that was standing at Bethel as a memorial of his vow; and commands him at the same time, evidently that he might fulfil his vow, to return unto the land of his kindred where this pillar was. To Canaan accordingly Jacob goes, but finding a fruitful country near Shalem, a city in Shechem, he pitches his tent there; just like Lot, preferring the fruitfulness of a heathen land to his spiritual obligations and privileges. True, he builds an altar in Shechem, and inscribes it to God, the God of Israel; and he thought perhaps this would do, and do well; but the God of Israel is a jealous God. He performs his promises to the very letter, to their full extent; and will have his commands observed to their full extent. He will make no compromise concerning them. Shechem, though in Canaan, is not the country of Jacob's family; Shalem is not Bethel; and this the patriarch at last finds out. God sends him there trouble upon trouble. He makes the heathen around him a snare and a curse to his family; he says to him in the ruin of one of his children and in the savage cruelty of two others, "You are not where you ought to be; begone from this place." And when all this fails, when his senseless or stubborn servant will not yet understand him, he speaks to him plainly from heaven, and says, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God." O the wonderful patience of Jehovah! How he bears with us in our worldly-mindedness, and stupidity, and forgetfulness! But if he loves us as he loves them that are his, he will remind us effectually one day or another of what we owe him, of what he has done for us and what we ought to have done for him. He has many ways of doing this. His most common way is

that which he employed here—he chastens us. Affliction comes to disturb us, and make us feel all is not right; and then comes the word of his mouth, some sermon or scripture, and brings the years that are past before us, with their forgotten mercies, forgotten obligations and vows. “Thou writest bitter things against me,” said Job, “and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.” And it is the same with the mercies of our youth, and the impressions and resolutions to which they give rise. They may die away in our minds, but not in God’s mind; and a day will come when he will make them rise, as it were, from the dead before us. They will recur to us again with a force that will surprise us. A voice from heaven could not say to us more plainly, “You had forgotten all these things, but I had not.”

And just observe the gentleness and tenderness of God towards Jacob on this occasion. He does not speak to him, though he well might do so, as an angry God; he does not upbraid him with his disobedience and forgetfulness. Before, in Padan-aram, he reminded him of his vow, but now he does not say one word of his vow; he simply commands him to arise, and go up to Bethel, and build there an altar. The man’s heart he sees to be sick and troubled, and he appears as though he could not bear to trouble him more. He must touch the hearts of his people; he is often constrained to wound them and wound them deeply; but his knife never goes a hair’s breadth beyond the necessity of the case. While he wounds, he lets them see that he pities and spares.

III. We come now to our third point—the *obedience the patriarch rendered to the divine command*. In this we shall find something to surprise us, something to instruct us, and something to encourage us.

Here is *something to surprise us*. There were strange gods, we find, in the house of Jacob at this time; yes, idols in the house of almost the only man in the world who worshipped the true God; and he knew they were there and tolerated them. Well may we ask, how was this? We must go back for an answer.

The Rachel whom he so tenderly loved and for whom he had so patiently waited and laboured, was an amiable, affectionate woman; but she wanted one thing, and that one thing was a decided love for the Lord God of Israel. She had been

brought up in an idolatrous country, and she herself was half an idolater. Accordingly, when he married her, he introduced a worshipper of false gods into his house; she had her secret idols, and she brought them with her. Here began perhaps Jacob's own forgetfulness of God, and here undoubtedly began much of the ungodliness and wretchedness of his children. Shall I say that we may learn here the vast importance of the connections which we form in the days of our youth? that there is a loud warning given here to the pious young never to let their affections wind round one who does not plainly and decidedly love the Lord? to let the heart break rather than give the heart to an idolater? I had rather speak to men like this patriarch, men who have households, children and servants. I would say to them, Dear brethren, look through your houses and ask, "Are there no idols here? Is there nothing here, that takes God's place in our hearts or our children's? Is there nothing here, that is opposed to God's will and law, and tends to God's dishonour?" Bad books, bad company, dangerous amusements, practices which the world does not condemn nor even some of those who profess to live above the world, but such as will not bear the trial of scripture for one moment, such as you would see the evil of in a moment did they not in some way or other fall in with your taste or interest—these are all idols; these will lead to irreligion and ungodliness in your houses; these will bring down on you God's displeasure and judgments. Mischief will rise up in your families from these things, and through your families God will smite you for them.

There is something also here *to instruct us*. It is the promptitude and decision of the patriarch's obedience.

There are times, brethren, when we feel we have a duty to perform, but we shrink from the performance of it, and we put it off; or else we set about doing only a part of it, and hope thus to quiet our conscience and satisfy God. And if we are not really the heaven-born, soul-converted children of God, this goes on to our dying day; postponed, half-performed duties characterize our whole history. But if there is within us the vital principle of godliness, a time comes when all this ends. God brings us to a stand still, and from that moment this trifling with God ceases. What he commands, we do; and, by his grace enabling us, we do it at once, and do it fearlessly and fully. God bears long with the hesitation and disobedience of

his children, but as surely as they are his children, they become at last obedient children, a willing people "in the day of his power." Look at Jacob. He forgets Bethel; or if not so, year after year he delays going there; but at last comes a command that rouses the man; he hears and at once obeys it. "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there," says God, "and make there an altar." He echoes immediately, you observe, God's command. "Let us arise," he says to his family, "and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto God." And mark—he feels that it will never do to go to Bethel carrying with him Rachel's idols, and profaning that holy place. His soul revolts at this. He knows that he has to do with a heart-searching God, and says at once unto his household and to all that are with him, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean." The quiet, silent tolerator of idolatry becomes decided in his opposition to it; he feels its contamination as well as sinfulness, and says, "We must cleanse ourselves from it."

And thus does the grace of God work sooner or later in every master of a family, in whom that grace is. He finds out that as the master of a family he is an accountable man. God has spoken to him, and he must speak to his household. He will not content himself, as he once did, with deploring the evils that are to be found in his house, saying, "I am sorry they are here, but I cannot help it;" he will say, "I must help it. I must at all events do what I can to help it. I must say to my children and servants, kindly but firmly, God has been very gracious to me, and I cannot have him dishonoured here by you. Put away the strange gods that are among you." He will reason the matter with them. Observe how Jacob does so; "The Lord answered me in the day of my distress; he was with me in the way which I went. He has blessed me exceedingly, and you have partaken of the blessings he has poured on me. It is right therefore that I should build this altar to him, and it is right that you should cast away your false gods, and go with me to build it."

And here too is *something to encourage us*.

Nothing is more common than to hear men say, "We cannot do what we would in our houses. We see there is much to be reformed there, but it is very difficult to set about reforming it, and impossible, we fear, to accomplish it." But, brethren,

bring the same principles to bear on your families, that you bring to bear, if you are the servants of Christ, on your own hearts. Has there never been any difficulty within them? Has there never been any thing to be accomplished in them, which seemed impossible? no secret idol to be put away, that seemed as though it would tear away the heart with it as it went? no long cherished, darling sin to be cast out? But where is that sin, and where is that idol now? "Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ," you will say, "they are gone. His grace has given us the victory." And will not his grace follow you when you really try to root idols and sins out of your families? You forget that God is on your side here also, and that here again you will be "workers together with him." Your children's hearts are not one whit harder than your own once were, nor their idols more worshipped and beloved. Look at Jacob's success. When he spake like a servant of God to his family, their hearts were melted before him. They obeyed him as cheerfully as he had obeyed the Lord. "They gave unto Jacob," we read, "all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears"—things that in those days were often of an idolatrous character—"and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem." No matter what became of them afterwards, he had done with them and so had his family, and they set off, doubtless with cheerful feelings, to Bethel. They had sinned, but the Lord, they might hope, had forgiven them, and they were now about to praise him together in the place he had appointed. "So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him; and he built there an altar, and called the place El-bethel, because there God appeared unto him."

And read on, brethren, to the end of this chapter. If you love your families, you will soon see why I have asked you to do so; and you will be affected by the goodness of God in dealing as he dealt at this time with this sinful patriarch. He was about to send death into his family. An old servant was first to go, and then soon after the Rachel he loved so well, was to follow her. And what must his feelings of thankfulness have been as he stood by that woman's corpse! How must he have blessed his God for having led him to separate between her and her idols before she died, and perhaps made him the means of turning

her heart to the Lord! At all events, he had this to comfort him—the wife of his bosom did not die an idolater. Your own feelings will apply this. To them and your God I leave you. Dying hours will come in your families as well as in Jacob's, and miserable some of them will be. By God's grace, try to act so now, that when they come, you may be saved the bitterness of self-reproach; saved from having to say, "There lies one whose body I cared for, but for whose precious soul I had scarcely a care or a thought."

SERMON XXIII.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

WEANEDNESS OF SOUL.

PSALM CXXXI. 2.—"Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even as a weaned child."

MANY expressions in the psalms, which now appear strange to us, we should cease to think so, were we acquainted with the circumstances under which they were written. Thus here—we are ready to deem the beginning of this psalm self-confident and bold, but it is called in the title of it "a song of David," and it is supposed to have been composed in his earlier days, when charges of pride and ambition were brought against him. One of his own brothers, you remember, attacked him in this way on his first coming to the army, and soon afterwards he was accused by others of aiming to dethrone Saul and usurp his kingdom. But O the comfort it gives the persecuted soul to turn from men to the Lord! "My friends scorn me," said the harassed Job, "but mine eye poureth out tears unto God. Behold, my witness is in heaven and my record is on high." And here comes David in this psalm appealing in the integrity of his heart to his heart-searching God. "Lord," he says, "my

heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty ; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." "I know thou hast promised me a crown, but I have never taken one step to gain it ; I have never vaunted myself on the prospect of it ; I do not even desire it." And then he explains to us how this was ; "My soul is even as a weaned child." "By thy free Spirit working within me, I am able to look with indifference on all earthly things. My heart is in none of them." A blessed frame of mind, brethren ! May the God of all grace bestow it on you and me !

We must consider, first, the nature of this weanedness of soul, what it is ; then, its sources, how we get it ; and, thirdly, its advantages, what it will do for us when we have it.

I. In its *nature*, it differs essentially from that disgust with the world, to which its ill usage and meanness sometimes give rise. It is one thing to be angry with the world or ashamed of it, and another to be weaned from it. Alter the world, ennobles it, and many a proud mind that now despises, would court it.

It is different also from that weariness of spirit, which generally follows a free indulgence in earthly enjoyments. There is such a thing as wearing out the affections. Solomon seems to have done this at one period of his life. "I have not a wish left," said a well-known sensualist of our own country, who had drunk deeply as he could drink of the world's cup. "Were all the earth contains spread out before me, I do not know a thing I would take the trouble of putting out my hand to reach."

This weanedness of soul pre-supposes a power left in the soul of loving and desiring. It is not the destruction of its appetite, but the controlling and changing of it. A weaned child still hungers, but it hungers no more after the food that once delighted it ; it is quiet without it ; it can feed on other things ; so a soul weaned from the world, still pants much as ever for food and happiness, but it no longer seeks them in worldly objects. There is nothing in the world, that it feels necessary for its happiness. This thing in it it loves, and that thing it values, but it knows that it can do without them, and it is ready to do without them whenever God pleases.

And you must not conceive that I am speaking now of evil things only, or of certain questionable pleasures and indulgences. I am speaking of all worldly things, good and bad. Money,

business, honour, pleasure, affection, friends, children, every thing of an earthly kind that the hungry heart of man ever delighted itself in—this weanedness of soul says of them all, “If need be, let them go.” It checks the mind in the pursuit of them, it sobers it in the enjoyment of them, it prepares it to part with them, it quiets it when they are gone. It enables a man to rejoice in them while he has them, as though he rejoiced not; and to weep for them when he loses them, as though he wept not. See it in Paul. “I have learned,” he says, “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and how to abound.” Is there any one thing, brethren, which you feel you could not bear to part with? Or is there any one earthly thing you feel you must obtain? Then you do not possess a weaned soul. Could you give up all you have at God’s call? and when you had done so, instead of saying, “There goes all my happiness,” could you say with a calm, though perhaps with a bleeding heart, “I can be happy still; my best treasure is yet left?” Then yours is a weaned soul. You may say with David, “I am even as a weaned child.”

If you ask me whether all true believers have this grace, I answer, No, not at least to the extent this psalm implies. It is imperfect even in those who have the most of it. In many of them, like every other grace, it is fluctuating, now triumphing over the natural earthliness of the soul, and now again losing for a while its power. This very David who says here so confidently and doubtless so truly, “My soul is weaned,” said afterwards, “My soul cleaveth to the dust.”

II. Let us enquire now into *the sources of this frame of mind*—how we get it.

One thing is certain—it is not our work. We do not bring ourselves to it. No infant weans itself. Here lies the misery of our condition—we not only seek our rest in things that can never yield it, but leave us to ourselves, we go on to the last seeking it in them. The soul “cleaves” to them. It may feel its want of something better, but it does not seek any thing better. Who is there among us, that has not felt again and again the world’s emptiness? Which of us has not a conviction in his mind, that he wants more than the world can give him? Yet look at us—most of us still go to this empty world to be filled. Time and experience have done nothing at all in this

matter for us. Our souls are as fast bound to the world as they were at first, or faster. The truth is, it is God, who must wean us from it. We shall never leave it of our own accord. It is God's own right hand, that must draw us from it. And how? The figure in the text will partly tell us.

1. *By embittering the world to us.*

As long as we can get sweetness and unalloyed sweetness from any earthly object, we shall never turn from it—such things are too rare in the earth, and we too hungry. God therefore, after a little, lays gall and wormwood on the thing we love, and more and more of it, till its sweetness goes, and at last we are afraid of it. O the anguish we sometimes get from the things that once delighted us! But O, brethren, the blessedness of that anguish! It is severing our hearts from the sin that was poisoning them. It is a part of that weaning process we must go through before our hearts are God's.

2. At other times *the Lord removes from us the thing we love.*

We want it still, for it is still sweet to us; but he says, "No, you shall have it no longer;" and then comes a worm and withers our gourd; friends are alienated; or breaches are made in our families, and graves are opened, and houses and hearts left desolate. We would not tear our soul from that object; God therefore tears that object from us, and says when he has done it, "Now look higher. Now you have love to spare; give it me."

3. But he weans us most from the earth *by giving us better food.*

The soul of man is an empty thing, and a craving one. It must have something to feed on, and no matter what it has, it will hold it fast and feed on it till it can get something better. To draw it away therefore from the world, some substitute for the world must be presented to it. It must see within its reach a nobler good, higher joys and pleasures. It must have a taste and relish for them, and some enjoyment of them. And so the Lord deals with his people. He weans them from this world by giving them some foretastes of another. By embittering some earthly things to them and taking others away, he forces them to look around them for some higher good, and then he presents himself to them in all his grace and glory, manifested in his incarnate Son, and says, "Here am I. I am the bread of life. Feed on me."

At first they found salvation only in the Lord Jesus ; now there is the joy of his salvation for them. At first they sought mercy only of God ; now they have communion and fellowship with him. They looked once to the Holy Spirit as a Sanctifier only ; now they go to him as a Comforter and find him one. And in proportion as they thus enjoy God, they lose their relish for other enjoyments. Worldly pleasures debase the soul ; they dispose it to sink deeper and deeper in its search for happiness, and to take up with viler things ; the soul is always the worse for them : spiritual pleasures exalt the soul ; they give it a distaste for all that is low and vile, and teach it to aspire to the very highest objects. "He that cometh to me," says our Lord, "shall never hunger," never hunger again after earthly things, "and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." The reason is, he shall find in Christ better food and better water, than the whole created universe can afford. He weans us from our admiration of the world by shewing us his own matchless glory. The world in all its gorgeousness is but a heap of dust in comparison with him ; the sun that shines on it is sackcloth, and the light of its brightest day is darkness. And he weans us from the love of the world by discovering to us the riches of his own love, its freeness, its compassion, its patience, its tenderness and sweetness, its vastness. Hear Paul ; "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world." "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord." "I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

But observe, the psalmist speaks in the text as though he had weaned his own heart ; "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother." And let a believer speak as he feels, he will often speak thus.

In doing our souls good, God deals with us as with rational creatures. A man's heart is not taken away from the world as a stone is lifted from one place to another ; it is made to detach itself from it. And hence it is that the work is not done without the soul's own concurrence in it, and without effort after effort on the soul's part. While God's providence and Spirit are both at work for the believer, the believer is obliged to submit himself to the process that is going on, and to take a part in it ; he is obliged to say, and to say it often, "I also must

work. Here is much that I must do. Here is a wrench for me to make. Here is a rising lust for me to crucify. Here is an object that I prize more than all the world, to be let go. O that this heart of mine would of itself forsake its idols ! but it will not. I have to tear it away from them." And no wonder then that he sometimes says when the work is done, "I have done it." But ask him when he says so, how he has done it? He will say, and say it with abounding thankfulness, "By a strength that is not mine." And ask him what has led him to do it, he will answer again, "Only because my gracious God has in his love compelled me. Had he left me alone when I was so madly seeking my rest in vanities, I should have been seeking it in them still. And were he to leave me alone even now after all that his providence and grace have done for me and taught me, I should in one hour be again feeding on ashes: the world would not have a more abject slave than I. Neither to will nor to do is mine. By the grace of my God, I am what I am."

You see then, brethren, that we may trace this weanedness of soul to various causes—if we look upwards, to God working by his Spirit in our hearts ; if we look around us, to worldly disappointments and afflictions ; if we look within us, to the discoveries we have had made to us of the grace and glory of the Lord Jesus in the gospel, and the joy they have imparted to us. And may I say we may trace it also to ourselves? to our own self-denial and efforts falling in with God's gracious purposes? If I do say so, I would say it to the glory of Jehovah's grace, for not an effort heavenward would one of us make did not the living God constrain us. We wean ourselves from our parent earth? No more than the hungry infant would wean itself from its mother's breast ; no more than the branch would tear itself from its native tree, and grow on another stem.

III. We come now to a third point—*the advantages of this grace*, what it will do for us. There are two things it will do.

1. *It will save us from much sin.* The want of it is the source of almost all our many inconsistencies and declensions. Holy men owe to this one want most of their sad falls, and all the triflers and self-deceivers in the church, who become apostates, become so from the same cause. Lot's wife looked back on Sodom only because her heart was not weaned from Sodom ;

and Demas forsook the apostles and the Lord also for a similar reason—he had left his heart in the world, and could not live away from it.

It is a miserable thing, brethren, for a man to come into the church of Christ, and drag after him the world's chain. He will most surely disgrace his Christian profession, and pierce himself through in the end with many sorrows. It must be so; for consider—most of the sins we fall into consist in one or the other of these two things, either loving lawful things too much or turning to unlawful things. Now if a man's heart is not weaned from the world, he will not always stop in his use of lawful things where God commands him to stop. He will be tempted to get all he can out of them, and to drain them dry. And then when they are taken from him or embittered to him, comes another danger—his hungry soul will urge him to break through the fence God's holy law has built around him, and try forbidden things. "This fellow-creature does not make you happy," it says, "but another may. That honest way of traffic does not make you rich, but there is another way which perhaps will. This pleasure is grown insipid, but that you have never tried; it may bring you new and fresh delight." A craving heart is never out of danger, and is seldom long without sin. A weaned heart is the only safe one. It does not need sin, it feels no want of any thing sin can do for it, and therefore it lives above it.

2. This weanedness of spirit *will keep us quiet under our many troubles.*

It is our immoderate love of earthly things, that makes the loss of them so very painful to us. Dear and sweet as they may be to us, we can do without them. God has indeed linked his creatures closely one to another, but never yet has he made one creature absolutely needful to another's happiness. "My happiness gone for ever because this or that object that I loved, is taken from me!" It is a heathen's thought. That soul is in a sad state and a sinful one, which can long indulge it. But indulge it we shall, if our hearts are cleaving to earthly objects. The Bible may say one thing to us when we are in trouble, but our feelings will say another. It may tell us that God does all things well, all things in love and faithfulness; but if we feel that he has stripped us bare and made us wretched, we shall be ready to quarrel with him for his love and faithfulness. There

is no submitting of ourselves to his ways, while worldly affections reign in us. Quietness and resignation in trouble are for the weaned soul, and for no other. It is the man who loves something better than the world, that can afford to lose the world. He only can let his staff go, who has ceased to lean much on it, and has been taught to lean rather on an everlasting arm. "The Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"—none can say this with Job, who cannot say also with David, "My soul is even as a weaned child."

And now, in conclusion, let me address a few words to three classes of persons among you.

And first to you who really love God, but are ready to complain of the pain and sorrow you endure in your way to him. Does not this text lay open to you one main cause of that sorrow? A weaned heart is absolutely needful for you. You can have little peace in this world without it, and most certainly without it you can never enjoy heaven. And where is the heart that can be weaned from a world it naturally loves, without pain? David here compares the process it must undergo, to an infant's sufferings when it is first denied its accustomed food. No matter how gently or tenderly its mother treats it, it will not be a weaned child without many a struggle. St. Paul uses a bolder figure. He compares it to the pain of dying, and the pangs of crucifixion. O what fools are we! We pray for a heavenly mind; God hears our prayers; he embitters one thing to us, and takes away another, in order to give us a heavenly mind; and then, "Why is this?" we ask; we wonder and complain. Let us rather say, "Lord, do with me what thou pleasest. Strip me of all I love; cut, pierce, and wound me as thou wilt; only perfect that which thou hast begun in me, only beat down the world in me, make my heart thine own, and I will bless thee."

There are others of you who are ready to complain, not of your troubles, but of the unweaned condition of your souls under them. "We could bear," you say, "our afflictions and thank our God for them, did we feel that they were detaching us from the earth and making us heavenly-minded; but we have been often in trouble, and yet after all what are we? One half of our heart is still left in the world we profess to have forsaken, and we cannot get it away." And where is the infant that is

weaned in an hour or a day? Where is the child that after one burst of tears and sobbing, ceases all at once to yearn for its former food? The process in this case is frequently a long as well as a painful one; and it is the same in your case, and must be.

The instant God converts the heart, he begins to wean it; but he does not say, "One wrench shall do." He says rather, "I will lengthen out that work through all that man's life. To his dying hour it shall be going on. Every year he lives, he shall be like an infant struggling in its mother's arms." He accordingly leaves in the heart much of its native earthliness, and this often rises up and troubles the soul that is in the main a mortified one. It sometimes makes the soul fear that it has never loved its God, and never sought him. But, brethren, we must do at such times as David says he did—we must "behave and quiet ourselves." We must not yield to despondency and impatience. We must rather fall in with God's slow and gradual method of disentangling our affections, and submit ourselves quietly to his blessed will. We must, as it were, begin again. By prayer, and watchfulness, and effort, we must aim to make a new breach between the world and us. Instead of repining that the work is so long in doing, let us rather wonder at the Lord's amazing patience with us and loving kindness towards us while he is doing it. O the opposition we make to all his ways of blessing us! A mother bearing with the frowardness of a half-weaned child, is nothing to God bearing with his self-willed people. He weary us? Is it not rather wonderful that we have not long ago wearied him? I say not, Take comfort from your corruptions, but I may say, Take comfort from the long-suffering that bears with you in your corruptions. Is it not a proof that he who has begun so good a work in you, means to finish it? Does it not seem to take up the concluding words of this psalm, and say, "Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever?"

And one word to you who know nothing of this weanedness of soul. I have spoken of it as not perfect in any heart; I might speak of it as mournfully imperfect in many really Christian hearts; but there is not a Christian heart beating on the earth, that is altogether destitute of it. If it has no place in your hearts, they most certainly are not yet under the influence of Christ's Holy Spirit or Christ's religion. If you have

not learned in any degree to withdraw your affections from this world, you have never even entered the way which leads to a better. "To be carnally-minded," the scripture says, "is death." "To mind earthly things," it tells us again, is to have for our end destruction. It does not say that the want of a weaned heart is injurious to us or dangerous, it declares it to be ruinous. Would that you believed its declarations! O that they might begin this day to alarm and grieve you! You are in a world ready to perish. If you are of it and cleave to it, you will assuredly perish with it. You need at this moment deliverance from it, as much as you will need deliverance from a still more fearful world in the great day of Christ's appearing.

SERMON XXIV.

THE SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE EASTER.

SINNERS MOURNING FOR THEIR PIERCED LORD.

ZECARIAH XII. 10.—"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son; and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

THIS was predicted of the Jews. It was fulfilled in part on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand of them together were brought to repentance: it will be completely fulfilled, when the whole nation receives the gospel. But what is true of a converted Jew, is true also of a converted Gentile; so that if we are really Christian men, this scripture is as true of us, as it ever has been or ever will be of any man whatever. It describes a sorrow which we ourselves have felt and are feeling still; a sorrow that forms, in every instance, one main part of vital godliness; without which we have no more real Christianity within us than a heathen or a stone.

It is a godly sorrow for sin then, that is to be our subject to-day; and our attention is called in the text to three particulars concerning it—first, its character; then, one of the causes which give rise to it; and then, thirdly, how it is that this cause does give rise to it. And O that before we have done, many here may say, “Lord, let this scripture be fulfilled in me. Let me look on him whom I have pierced, and mourn.”

I. We are to consider *the character of godly-sorrow*. And in what a simple, yet affecting manner, does the text set this forth to us! It compares it to a sorrow we have all either experienced or witnessed—a father’s or mother’s sorrow for the death of a child, only, it says, that child must be a very dear one, an “only son” or a “first-born.”

Now this, we know, is a *real*, not a pretended sorrow.

If we look into our hearts, many of us will see that our sorrow for sin is all pretence. We know we are sinners, and we know also that we ought to feel much grief on account of our sinfulness: but do we feel it? Our consciences say, Never. We are not exactly hypocrites in the matter. We are rather like those persons who put on mourning for a friend they have lost, and are content with that—they do not really grieve for him. But does a parent mourn in this way over his child? Ask him. Does a contrite sinner mourn thus over his guiltiness? Ask him also. There is the reality of grief in both these men. They will both say, “We are indeed mourners. We need not ask whether we ought to mourn—we feel that we must mourn. The Lord grant that our grief may not break our hearts.”

For observe again—this sorrow is a *deep*, not a superficial or slight sorrow.

We may really mourn for a friend, but yet mourn for him very little. A sigh or two, a tear or two, a few pensive thoughts, and our grief may be over. But not so when our children die. Our grief then, as some of us well know, is pungent and bitter. It is not only in the heart, but down very low in it. We can enter most feelingly into what old Jacob said, “If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved”—I am desolate indeed. Now turn to the text. “They shall mourn,” it says, “as one mourneth for his only son; and shall be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.” And read the next verse; “In

that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem." "But this," you may say, "applies to the converted Jews, that fearfully guilty people. Is it true of all converted sinners? Is every penitent heart afflicted to this extent?" I answer, not always at first, for it does not half know at first what it has to afflict it; but give it time, let the Spirit of God work on it a few months or years, and the result is certain, as certain as daylight when the sun rises, or the melting of ice when the summer comes—that heart will mourn for sin as it has never mourned for any thing else. It will want now no sermon or book to explain such a scripture as this. Its own deep, bitter feelings will explain it. Bitterly did Peter weep when he wept for sin, and the anguish of David's soul when he wept for it, was well nigh intolerable. Read the fifty-first psalm, or the thirty-eighth. He complains in them of broken bones and a broken heart. "I am troubled," he says; "I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. I am feeble and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart."

And to shew the greatness of this sorrow, mark also that it is represented here as a *secret, solitary* thing.

Most of us, when our hearts are full, wish to be alone. Deep emotions of any kind send us to our chambers. Thus we find Joseph hastening to his chamber when he felt that he must weep; and so also, we are told, David went up into his, when he wept for Absalom. You who have troubled hearts, can understand this. You are secret mourners, and feel you must be so. Your bitterest tears are shed alone.

Now look to the end of this chapter. "The land," we read, "shall mourn," not as in other times of public affliction, in one solemn assembly, the elders, the priests, the ministers of the Lord, the people and children, all weeping together in the temple before the Lord—"every family shall mourn apart, and their wives apart." There shall be no passing from house to house. So deep shall be the grief, that neighbour shall have no intercourse with neighbour, no, nor husband with his wife. The land shall be full of solitary mourners, all every where getting alone, that they may pour out their hearts in secret. And great stress is laid here on this circumstance. More than ten times is this word "apart" repeated.

The question is then, are we mourners of this sort? Do we mourn apart, alone and in secret, over our sins? If not, if our

sorrow for sin is confined to the communion-table and the church, if our chambers and pillows know nothing of it, we may be sure that God knows nothing of it; it is all pretence; we do not mourn over sin at all. Peter "went out" when he wept bitterly; and the instant our hearts are smitten by God's Holy Spirit, we shall go aside too. Like the agitated Joseph, we shall seek where to weep, and enter into our chamber and weep there. With the arrows of God in us, we shall go, like the stricken deer, out of sight, that we may bleed alone. O for this secret sorrow, brethren, in your families and chambers! It would soon make those families and those chambers some of the holiest, yes, and some of the happiest, in the world.

We may remember then these three marks of godly sorrow—it is real, deep, solitary. "A strange sorrow," some of you may think, and no wonder—it comes from what you will deem a strange source.

II. Notice now *one of the causes that excite it*. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn."

But who is the speaker here? It is clear that he must be the great God himself; for mark—he says in the beginning of the verse, "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications;" and who can send down this Spirit from heaven, but the great King of heaven, the everlasting Jehovah? What prophet or angel would dare to say that he would send him? But then we read here that he who thus pours forth the Spirit, has been "pierced;" and this represents him in another and lower character, as a creature, a vulnerable man. And by this seeming contradiction, the text discovers to us at once who is speaking to us. It is the Lord Jesus Christ; he who is God and man in one flesh; he who is so high, that he can give the Holy Spirit to whomsoever he pleases, and who was once so low, that the vilest arm on the earth might wound him; and wounded he was. "They pierced my hands and my feet," he says. St. John settles this point beyond all dispute. "One of the soldiers," he says, "with a spear pierced his side;" and then he immediately tells us why he was allowed of God to do so—that this very scripture should be fulfilled, "They shall look on him whom they pierced."

But what is meant here by "looking" on him? The Roman soldier who pierced him, could see him; we cannot. Though in spirit he is near us, yea, within us if we are his, yet in his bodily substance he is far away. We can no more behold him, than we can behold the throne he sits on, or a fellow-creature in some distant land. Here again we have one of those expressions of frequent occurrence in scripture. Outward bodily actions are made use of to describe inward operations, the actings of the mind. "Come unto me," says our Lord, "and I will give you rest." By this he means, "Let your souls turn to me for rest. Seek your rest in me. Make me your refuge and solace." So here; "They shall look on me;" that is, "They shall attentively consider me; I shall become the object of their close contemplation and searching thoughts. Their minds shall be fastened on me." And so the word is explained in the twelfth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. "Looking unto Jesus," the apostle says in the second verse, and then in the next verse he adds, meaning doubtless the very same thing, "Consider him;" that is, "Contemplate him; think of him over and over again."

And observe—these penitents are said to look on him as "pierced."

Men in our day have told us, that one great reason why the Jews are not converted, is, that we do not sufficiently exhibit the Lord Jesus to them in his exaltation and glory. But what a refutation of all such assertions is here! When they are converted, they shall look on him, says the Spirit, as pierced, as abased and crucified.

Others have said that if we want to prize the Lord Jesus more, we must think of him more as enthroned in heaven. And we may get this good out of what these men say—to take care lest we overlook his majesty and greatness. But, brethren, we must not suffer men to mislead us. If we want life for our perishing souls, if we wish to have our hard hearts really broken to pieces, it is on the cross, not on his throne, that we must contemplate our Lord. Then took they Jesus and bound him; they stripped and scourged him; when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it on his head; they smote him with their hands; they spat on him; they gave him gall for his meat, and in his thirst they gave him vinegar to drink; Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost—O brethren,

there is more in such simple words as these to touch our hearts, if we love our Master, than there would be in all the blaze of heaven's glory. It is a blessed thing to look on the Lord Jesus in any character or in any condition ; there comes virtue out of him to do us good ; but the contrite sinner finds it best for him to look on him as his pierced Saviour, his bleeding and dying Lord. And he himself loves best to be thus looked on. No emblem of his greatness did he leave behind him, no sign of his majesty and power ; but his broken body, his poured out blood—"Never forget them," he says. "Here is bread and wine to remind you of them. Do this in remembrance of me."

But observe again—these contrite sinners are described as looking on the Lord Jesus as pierced by them ; "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." How they ? I answer, not literally or strictly, for in this sense the prophecy can apply only to one poor heathen soldier. But the same act, you are aware, may be ascribed to different persons in different senses. Let an offender against the laws of his country be put to death, the judge may be said to have occasioned his death, for he condemned him ; the jury, for they found him guilty ; the executioner, for he deprived him of life ; and more properly still the man's own crimes ; he dies the victim of his crimes. Now turn to our Lord. Herod crucified him ; Pilate crucified him ; the Jews with wicked hands crucified and slew him. And who besides ? The transgressions that he died for. And whose were they ? Not his own, for the very judge who condemned him, pronounced him innocent. They were ours. "He was wounded for our transgressions ; he was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him ;" and we therefore, we guilty men, may be said to have slain him. And every true penitent bears this in mind. He cannot forget it. He regards his Lord, as not only pierced and pierced for him, but pierced by him. "I sharpened that spear," he says. "My wicked arm gave him that blow. It was my guilt that sent the iron into his soul." And hence springs the man's sorrow. Looking thus on the Lord Jesus, he learns to mourn for sin in the way this scripture represents him as mourning for it—really, deeply, secretly ; and his sorrow is greater or less, as his eye is fixed more or less intently on his suffering Redeemer. And this, in every case, holds true. Point out a man who thinks lightly of the Redeemer's sufferings, who does not remember

the part he had in them, who will not believe that they were a great propitiation for his great sins—we do not want to ask a single question concerning that man; we are as sure as though we saw his inmost thoughts, that he is not a mourner in Zion. He may say he is contrite, but he does not even understand what contrition means. Am I speaking to such a man? If so, I would say and say it plainly, Brokenness of heart is not that light thing you deem it. Your miscalled rational religion never has produced it; it never will; no more than the cold moon-beams will thaw ice. You have a heart that will never break, till you look on the dying Jesus and say, “He is dying for me. I have pierced him. It is the burden of my iniquities, that is pressing on his soul.”

III. We may now pass on to enquire *how it is that godly sorrow arises from this source*; in other words, why this looking on his crucified Lord makes the believer mourn.

Some of us might rather have expected to read, it will make him rejoice; for he sees there a price paying for his ransom. But this is not said. We read, “They shall look on me and mourn.”

And how, I would ask, can it be otherwise? Place yourselves in imagination by the side of some dear friend lying cold and dead. Let some one come and tell you in that situation, that he died a lingering and painful death, after having endured for years before a long series of troubles, griefs, and labours; your hearts would feel, brethren. But suppose it was added that he thus lived and thus died to render you some great service; and more—that it was through your own folly and wickedness, that all his dreadful sufferings came upon him. Suppose too something within you said, as you looked on his emaciated and woe-worn frame, “It is all true; this really has been my work;” should you not be pierced to the quick? Should you say, “I shall derive this and that good from his death?” Should you not rather say, “Let me get somewhere alone and weep?” Would not this text describe, and describe well, your feelings and conduct? If ever there were men on the earth, who were real, bitter, solitary mourners, they would be you. You know how to apply this. The comparison is weak, but it will shew you that great sorrow in a Christian’s heart as he thinks of his dying Lord, is a natural thing, a reasonable thing, an unavoid-

able thing. You will not say to me, "Go on and prove to us that we shall feel it." You will rather say, "We do feel it. How can we avoid it? O that we felt it more! O that we could weep day and night for the death of our blessed Master, and for our base transgressions which were the causes of it! O the enormous guilt of those transgressions! What must it be, how fearfully great and dark, to have brought the King of glory thus low!" "It is no common blood," says the sinner, "that is flowing there for me. There dies for me God's everlasting Son, yea, my incarnate God himself. And O the amazing love there must be in his soul to be willing to stoop so low for one so vile! My heart has swelled nigh to bursting as I have looked on a departed friend, and thought within myself, 'How did that man, or that woman, love me!' but here is love! The sword of justice was drawn to smite me; and what did my Saviour do? Pity me? Plead and entreat that it might not smite me? No; he came between me and that sword, and received its thrust into his own heart. And after all this, what have I been, and what am I still? His devoted servant? talking of his love every hour, singing his praises, doing his work in the world, and bringing honour in it to his name? Alas! I have lived, for the greater part, as though I owed him nothing; as though he had never shewn me a single kindness, or shed for me a tear. And ask you me why I mourn as I think of him? Rather ask how it is that I can do any thing else. You may tell me that I need not mourn; I feel that I must. The Lord pardon me that I mourn so little!"

And now, brethren, what are we to learn from all this? At least two things.

One is, *the high place we ought to give sorrow for sin among Christian graces*. See how much is brought forward in this single verse as combining to produce it. Here is our Lord first on his throne. In order that we may have it, he promises to pour out his Holy Spirit upon us, "the Spirit of grace and of supplications;" that is, he will put his grace abundantly into our hearts, and excite in our hearts by it much supplication and prayer. "And now," we may say, "the work is done. With grace in our hearts making us praying men, we shall surely be contrite men." But no; something more is yet needed. The Saviour must leave his throne, and exhibit himself to us on the

cross ; he must cause us to look on him there, and to feel as we look that we sent him there ; and then at last this sorrow for sin springs up in us, we are at last mourners. All this process is gone through, not to fill our hearts with hope and joy, but to soften and break them.

You see then, brethren, what we really make light of, if we at any time make light of godly sorrow. We set at nought all the things that lead to this sorrow and are connected with it—the grace of the Holy Spirit, supplication and prayer, a looking by faith on our dying Lord.

And to raise this grace still higher in our estimation, observe the peculiar manner in which it is here described. It is called a mourning for Christ himself. Sin is no where mentioned in the whole passage, though it is every where meant. Our Lord seems to speak as though it were a mourning that gives him pleasure ; just as we might suppose our sorrow for a departed friend would give pleasure to the spirit of that friend, were he conscious of it. There is love for him, strong affection for him, in this sorrow ; and because there is, he delights in it.

The second thing to be inferred from this scripture, is, *the earnestness with which we ought to desire for ourselves this holy mourning*. “Desire it?” you may say. “Desire sorrow, and a sorrow of this deep and bitter kind?” I answer, Yes, desire it. You know not how precious it is, nor how blessed. No man yet who ever possessed it, has wished to get rid of it. It is indeed a bitter thing ; there comes along with it many a tear and pang ; but yet there is mingled with it a comfort and a blessedness which must be felt to be known. The very look which makes the heart bleed, is a look at One who can do more than heal it. While the soul mourns, its pierced Saviour is speaking peace to it ; and better to mourn with him for our comforter, than to be the most rejoicing of the joyous with him far away.

Pray for this sorrow, brethren. You have asked for many mercies of God ; begin to-day to ask for this. Others around you have been mourning long for their sins ; why should you go on all through your life making light of yours ? When would you mourn and weep for them if not now ? Somewhere you must weep for them ; would you keep back this weeping till you come into that world, where tears are never dried up ; where you must weep, if you weep at all, for ever ? And somewhere

too you must look on this pierced Jesus. Will you look on him for the first time when he opens the heavens and calls you out of your graves to his judgment-seat? "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him." It is a blessed though a mournful thing to see him now, but it is a dreadful thing to see him for the first time in the very moment when his work of mercy is for ever ended, when the fountain he has opened for sin and for uncleanness is for ever closed. Beseech him to reveal himself to you this very day. Implore him to give you now a true and realizing faith in him. Let your prayer be, "Lord, pour out on me this day the Spirit of grace. Turn my unworthy eyes on thee; cause me to feel the guilt of those sins which crucified thee; and bid me mourn. Thy grace is free, and it is mighty. How easy were it for thee to give me repentance unto life! One touch of thy hand, O blessed Saviour, yea, one word or one look of thine, could break at once this hard heart within me. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me. Take away the heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh. O put within me that broken and contrite heart, which thou wilt not despise."

SERMON XXV.

GOOD FRIDAY.

THE PERFECTION OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT.

HEBREWS x. 12, 13, 14.—"But this Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool; for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

OUR church is calling on us to-day to commemorate in an especial manner our Lord's crucifixion. The apostle, in this chapter, sets forth the object of his crucifixion, and the completeness with which this object has been accomplished. In the text indeed he seems to be viewing him in his exaltation rather

than in his sufferings, but he has still the same thing in his mind—he sees in his exaltation a proof of the efficacy of his sufferings. He would not now have been there, he intimates, on that lofty throne, had he not first done for us on his cross all that was needful for us, all that humiliation and suffering ever can accomplish. He places the Lord Jesus before us in two situations—first on earth, and then in heaven.

I. We see him on *the earth* ; and this is what he is said to have done here—“he offered one sacrifice for sins.”

The apostle, we must remember, is both comparing and contrasting him with the Jewish priests. His object is to shew us that he is all to the church these priests ever were, and all in a much higher degree.

He, first, *compares him with them*.

Now one part of their office was to make reconciliation or atonement for the sins of the people. Previously to the establishment of the Mosaic law, any one might build his altar and slay his victim ; but the law put a stop to this. The people were no longer to offer sacrifices each one for himself ; an order of priests was appointed to sacrifice for them. And thus more thoroughly the church was taught that it could do nothing whatever towards the expiating of its own transgressions. And we can do nothing, brethren. We Christians under the gospel are just as helpless in this respect, as the Jews were under the law. There is a burden of guilt on us, a dark mass of it ; and we can no more remove it off us, than we could remove the huge mountains from the face of the earth. We have nothing to present to God as a compensation or atonement for our sins ; and had we ever so much, God would not accept it at our hands. We are so sinful, that coming to him in our own name, he will receive nothing at our hands, he will not suffer us even to approach him. But we, like the Jews, have a priest provided for us ; and what does he do ? Take our sacrifices, our repentance and prayers and good works, and offer them up as a propitiation to his holy Father for our sins ? Some men will tell us so, but we might as well expect him to take the dust or dirt beneath our feet, and present them to his Father. No ; Christ offered up himself for us. The former part of the chapter describes him as coming into the world for this very purpose, and taking on him for this purpose the mortal body prepared for him. Standing

here before God as the great High Priest of his church, and seeing that his church had nothing to offer, seeing that God took no pleasure in the blood of bulls and of goats, or in any of the sacrifices that were offered under the law, he put them all aside, and laid himself down on God's altar. The priest himself became the victim. He made his own body and his own soul, himself in his whole, entire human nature, an offering and a willing offering for our sins.

Thus far then our Lord resembles the Jewish priests—he really offered a sacrifice.

But the apostle also *contrasts him with them*. He made, he says, one sacrifice only.

"Every priest," we read in the eleventh verse, "standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices." Under the law, there was no end to the priests' work. Some of them were obliged to be standing all the day long at the altar, occupied in sacrificing or prepared for it; for besides the two great public sacrifices at morning and evening, any man might bring his sin-offering or trespass-offering at any hour to the temple, and there must be a priest waiting to receive and present it. And all this went on year after year for ages. The fire on the altar was kept continually burning, and the blood of victims almost as continually flowing—significant but awful emblems of the unceasing, ever-burning displeasure of Jehovah against man's transgressions, and the utter insufficiency of all that man can do, to remove it. "But this Man," says the text, the Lord Jesus, our great High Priest, "offered one sacrifice," one only, and when he had offered that, his work was done. There was in his case no perpetual standing by the altar, no daily ministering, no multiplying of victims. His precious blood once shed, all is over; the fire on the altar goes out, and the altar itself is soon thrown down and destroyed.

And here become evident two blessed truths.

1. *One sacrifice serves for all God's church*—not only one priest, but one offering.

The number that form this church, we cannot estimate. It is represented however in scripture as so exceedingly great, that even Christ himself at the last, with all his mighty love for sinners, does not wish it greater. It satisfies him, we are told, satisfies him for the travail of his soul. Now comes this text and says, all this immense multitude redeemed from among

men, owe all their salvation, all their safety, happiness, and glory, to one sacrifice only, one offering once offered, "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The blood of Jesus Christ it describes as so efficacious, so precious, that its virtue extends to all believing sinners in all ages of the world. It reaches backwards to Adam, the first of mortal sinners; it reaches forward to the last of Adam's sons, that shall be born on the earth and cry for mercy on it. No matter how many sinners may need it, it is enough for all; and no matter how long sinner after sinner may apply to it, it is enough still. Would you know the extent of this sacrifice, brethren, where its power stops? We cannot tell you, but we can tell you this—it is as extensive as human guilt. "All we," says Isaiah, "have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way"—there is the evil, the wide extent of it; now comes the broad, ample remedy—"the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

2. *This one offering of Christ serves effectually for all God's church.* Not only are all his people cleansed, they are all fully and eternally cleansed, by it.

This was the truth dear above all others to the apostle's heart, and he labours in this epistle and in other parts of his writings, to prove and establish it. No other sacrifice, he tells us here, could accomplish this great work. The legal sacrifices certainly could not. They were no real expiations of sin, he says in the beginning of this chapter, but rather "remembrances of sins," acknowledgments and memorials of it. Their very number, he argues, their long continuance in the church, proves their insufficiency, for why were they so continually repeated if their work was done? Why did they not cease if the worshippers were cleansed? But there they were, going on year after year, staining the altar anew morning and evening, and proclaiming anew morning and evening to the assembled people that sin still rested on their souls; that many as had been the sacrifices which had bled for them, their sin remained, and they needed still some nobler, some more efficacious sacrifice to take it away. But the Lord Jesus comes, his blood flows on the altar, and there ends for ever all sacrifice and offering. It ends because it is no longer needed, there is nothing now left for it to do. The sins of God's people are now expiated, all without exception, and all perfectly and eternally without recal. Hence it is said in the text, "he hath perfected," and perfected "for

ever, them that are sanctified;" that is, he has left nothing to be done for the expiating of their guilt, nothing by them and nothing for them. The atonement he has made for it, is all that God asks for, all he will ever ask for; it satisfies God, and will satisfy him for ever. Hence too it was predicted of him, that when he should make reconciliation for iniquity, he should "finish the transgression and make an end of sins;" so completely atone for them, that he should put them, as it were, out of existence, exterminate them. And as though anticipating this, the Lord says in another place, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found."

If we ask what gives this sacrifice its immense superiority over all others, its perfect, boundless virtue? the answer is easy—it is a sacrifice offered by God himself to his own dishonoured justice; not only chosen by him, and therefore precious; not only appointed by him, and therefore acceptable; but provided by him and offered by him; he himself, in the person of his everlasting Son, is the priest, and scripture would almost bear us out were we to say, he himself is the victim. The Man of whom this text speaks, is God incarnate, a man in whom the eternal Son of the Highest has taken up his dwelling, and with whom he has united and identified himself. He is as truly God as he is man, so that when he offered his one sacrifice for sins, though it was his human nature only that he laid down, yet we may say that it was the mighty God who laid it down. Jehovah himself furnished the sacrifice for Jehovah's people. Therefore "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," because it was the blood of one identified with the Godhead. His union with the Godhead gave to his blood a virtue that is boundless, infinite as his own infinite nature, wide and vast as our sins and lasting as eternity.

II. We must now follow our Lord *into heaven*. The text carries him there, and it carries him there, we must remember, in his human nature; and more than that—in the character he bore here in his human nature, the great Expiator of our sins. "This Man," it says, "after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." There is an allusion here to Psalm cx. 1. "The Lord said unto my

Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." This scripture seems to have struck the apostle's mind with peculiar force, for he has referred to it in his writings three times over. The reason probably is, that it conveyed to his spiritual mind most glorious ideas of his Lord's greatness ; and in the contemplation of his glory and greatness rested much of his own happiness. And there, brethren, will more of our happiness rest, as we more and more love the Saviour, and have our hearts raised to the heaven he inhabits.

His language intimates to us, first, *the repose of Christ in heaven*, a repose indicating the completeness and perfection of the work he had performed on earth.

The Levitical priests, the apostle says, "stand daily ministering," are kept standing and sacrificing, because their offerings are still incomplete ; "this Man, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins," not only ceased from offering, but went and "sat down," sat down "for ever," like one who knows that he has no more to do, can never again have a sacrifice to offer, can remain in unalterable, undisturbed, eternal rest. The position he takes shews us that there is a consciousness in his mind of the completeness of his atoning work.

The apostle's language declares also *the high exaltation of Christ in heaven*.

Two of his people, it would seem, had already gone there as he went, in human flesh, Enoch and Elijah. The angels, we may suppose, must have wondered as they saw them entering that holy world, and advancing onward and onward in it till they drew near as themselves to Jehovah's throne. But here comes one in human flesh, and stops not till he reaches that throne itself. He ascends where no angel ever yet dared to ascend or could ascend ; he places himself by Jehovah's side on Jehovah's throne. And the great Jehovah bears this. He welcomes there this Son of Man, and bids him remain there for everlasting ages. And not only so, he invests him there with sovereignty and power. He might have been exalted to God's right hand, and when there have sat in unemployed enjoyment of his height and glory ; but he sits there as God's minister and representative, to rule over all things in God's stead. The eternal Father puts the sceptre of his government into his hands, commits the empire of his church and kingdom and universal nature to him, and bids him anticipate the time when all things

in them shall be subdued to his sovereign will. "Expecting till his enemies be made his footstool"—looking forward to the hour when every knee shall bow to him, when there shall not be a single creature throughout God's universe, who does not feel his greatness and acknowledge his authority and power.

But what connection, you may ask, has this with his earthly sufferings? What have his present exaltation and his future universal empire to do with his long ago offered sacrifice? They arise out of that sacrifice, they are the fruits and results of it. "He became obedient unto death," says this apostle, "even the death of the cross; wherefore God also hath exalted him." "Therefore," says the Lord by Isaiah, "will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong:" wherefore? "Because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many." These scriptures shew that our Lord's glory is most closely connected with his sufferings and sacrifice. They not only follow one another in order of time, but they are connected one with another as cause and effect. And from this we may infer the efficacy of his sufferings, the completeness of his sacrifice. More than the salvation of his people was made to depend on his offering for sin; his own exaltation and glory as the Son of Man were suspended on it. They were the promised rewards of his work on earth, and when we see him ascending on high and receiving these rewards, exalted to God's right hand and reigning in glory there, we know that his work is done, and effectually and completely done. The offering he has made, has raised him from this low world, from the cross and the grave, to Jehovah's throne; it is therefore an offering acceptable to Jehovah, satisfactory to him, a perfect offering, and by it "he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." He himself is at the very summit of heaven by virtue of it—a blessed proof to his people that they shall be raised to heaven by virtue of it, that he has opened by it the kingdom of heaven to all believers. It has exalted him, and it will exalt us. It has placed him near to God, and it will bring us nigh.

On reviewing what has been now said, the first thing which occurs to us, is the strange reception which the great truth taught us in this text, meets with in our world. Look at the

great mass of nominal Christians—were we to say that they are all as one man at war against it, we should hardly be overstating the fact. What is popery but one great effort to corrupt, smother, and conceal it? Its masses, its penances, its mediators, its purgatory, almost every thing that is peculiar to it, strikes directly at the all-sufficiency of the Redeemer's sacrifice. No man can be a consistent follower of that wretched faith, but he must at every turn put under his feet this glorious truth; he must either altogether reject or altogether forget it. I scarcely dare speak of the opposition now rising up within our own church to it. It is painful, deeply painful; were it not so daring and fearful, it would be pitiable. A church such as ours, so blessed, so favoured above all others, to be the church above all others in protestant lands to deny the perfection of its great Redeemer's sufferings, and to talk about the sacrifice of sacraments, and the atoning power of almsgivings and fastings and penitence and our poor, miserable works! May the Lord pardon us in this thing, and speedily avert from us the sin and danger of it! But the evil lies deep in our nature, brethren. We are all naturally opposed to the free and full salvation of Jesus Christ. It is not only something high beyond our expectations, it is something humbling beyond what we conceive to be our condition and deserts. While it tells us we have nothing to do in order to have our sins remitted, but to take the full remission Christ has purchased, it tells us as plainly that we can do nothing, that the guilt of our sins is too heinous and enormous for us to remove the smallest part of it; and this we cannot bear; we look favourably on, tolerate, perhaps embrace, any system, no matter how unscriptural, absurd, or heathenish, which represents sin as a less evil than the gospel makes it, and ourselves as less criminal and fallen.

And turn to those among us, who profess to value this blessed truth—what difficulty do even we find in really receiving it! how obstinately do our still proud, self-righteous, doubting hearts seem to shut themselves up against the reception of it! Theoretically we subscribe to it, and, we should say, heartily, joyfully subscribe to it; but let the conscience be disturbed, let our souls ache within us at the remembrance of our past iniquities or under a sense of our present vileness—then let some one come and present this great truth to our minds; then let us be told of our guilt all cancelled, our sin all done away

with, by the blood of Christ ; not a stain of it left on us for our tears to wash away, nor one particle of wrath left in the divine mind on account of it for our prayers to remove—this is just what we want, we say, but it seems the very last thing we can credit. Credit it however we must before as guilty creatures we can have any good hope within us, any real peace of mind, any warm love for the Saviour who bled for us, or any happy acquaintance with his salvation.

SERMON XXVI.

EASTER SUNDAY.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST GLAD TIDINGS.

ACTS XIII. 32, 33, 34.—“ We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.”

WE can all enter in some degree into these words. We feel that the tidings of our Lord's resurrection really are glad tidings; and we can easily conceive too that on the day when he actually arose, they must have been to his first disciples tidings of exceeding joy. Their doubts all removed, their fears gone, their fondest hope realized, and realized just as it was expiring, their beloved Master alive again on the earth and soon to be seen of them—we are ready to say that if ever there was gladness of heart felt in our world, it was felt by these wondering men at this time. But if we look at the words before us, we shall find that they were not uttered at this joyful season, nor by any one of these first disciples. They were spoken by Paul ten or twelve years afterwards. And yet at the end of this long

interval, he proclaims our Lord's resurrection apparently with as much joy as Peter or John would have proclaimed it just after it had happened. He announces it to his countrymen assembled round him at Antioch, as though it were the most joyful thing he could announce to them. "We declare unto you glad tidings," he says, and these glad tidings are, "God hath raised up Jesus again." We naturally ask then, what makes this event so joyful a one, permanently so joyful a one? and the answer is, its importance, the bearing it has on our salvation and happiness.

The view we now propose to take of it, is that only which the apostle here presents to us. It is clearly the same view he had in his own mind when he proclaimed its joyfulness, and if we look at it aright, it will, with God's blessing, afford us pleasure and joy.

I. He describes it as *the work of God*. Men, he says, condemned and crucified our Lord. Men accomplished all the divine purposes concerning him as far as his sufferings and death were concerned. "They fulfilled all that was written of him;" and then "they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre." But there his humiliation ended, and with that ended the interference of men with him. From this point his exaltation is to begin; and here God comes in and puts man aside, no longer employing man's agency, but performing henceforth all his will concerning his dear Son himself. "They took him down from the tree and laid him in a sepulchre, but God raised him from the dead."

Before his death, our Lord, to manifest his dignity, or rather his divinity, had asserted on more than one occasion, his power to raise himself. "Destroy this temple," he said to the Jews, the temple of his body, "and in three days I will raise it up." "I have power to lay down my life," he said to his disciples, "and I have power to take it again." We might have expected therefore that after he had laid it down, he would take it again; that by his own divine agency he would re-animate his mortal clay, and bring it forth from the tomb. But it is remarkable that after his resurrection had actually taken place, it is seldom or never ascribed to himself. Once, to declare to us the Holy Spirit's power, it is said to be his work, but scripture, in almost every other instance, refers it as here to the Father. "God raised him up;" "God brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus;" "he liveth by the power of God." The reason of this

doubtless is, that we may connect his resurrection with the Father, that we may see the Father's hand in it, that we may think as we commemorate it, not only of our glorious Redeemer, our rising Lord, but of the glorious Jehovah, the Lord of all power and might, who raised him. The importance of our doing so, we shall see as we go on. All we need observe now is, that presented to us thus as God's work, our Lord's resurrection assumes already a joyful character. It shews us that the eternal Father took to the very last, not only an interest, but a part, in all that Christ did for our salvation. His heart was so much engaged in making a way for our salvation, that he would not be a mere spectator of any thing that was done to effect it; he must act in it, and he must let us know that he has acted in it. It was so from the first. The apostle says that our Lord "humbled himself," came of his own free accord into this world of sin and sorrow; but God says, "I gave him to the world; I sent him into it." Men persecuted and afflicted, crucified and slew him; and with this surely, we might say, his Father could have nothing to do; but he says, "I had much to do with it. Those wicked hands are only doing what my hand and my counsel determined before to be done." And now he is to be raised from the dead, "I will do that also," says God, "and do it entirely. It shall be my work, and that it may be seen to be my work, none but myself shall have ought to do with it." Once again then, brethren, we see that there is a perfect harmony and concert throughout between the Father and the Son in the work of our salvation. The Father does not stand by in displeasure, waiting to be appeased by the Son before he concurs in it, he concurs in it from the first; he tells us at every step that he is a party concerned in it, and a willing and joyful one.

II. Our Lord's resurrection is set forth next in this passage as *the fulfilment of a divine promise*. It was not only, the apostle says, the work of God, but a work he had long ago engaged to perform; "The promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again." He then quotes two or three prophecies containing this promise, foretelling our Lord's resurrection, and seems to say that he rejoices in his resurrection, partly because he sees in it the divine faithfulness, because he recognizes in it the God of his fathers remembering his promise and keeping it.

"The promise which was made unto the fathers"—this, you perceive at once, was touching a string that would find a ready response in the hearts of the apostle's hearers. They were most of them Jews, for he was speaking in a synagogue; and this was connecting the risen Jesus with their own God, Abraham's God, Israel's God, the God who had shewn through so many ages so much favour to their nation and people. It was telling them that his resurrection had been in Jehovah's mind and thoughts when he spake to their fathers, and was one of the many mercies he had long ago promised them. It was God's work, not simply as God over all, but as their God, the God who had loved them even from of old as he had loved none others, and bound himself to them by engagements and promises. And joyful indeed it is to the soul, brethren, to see in Christ, when we can see it, the peculiar love of Jehovah towards us. That he has a peculiar people in the world, a people whom he specially loves and to whom he has made special promises, the scripture plainly tells us. It tells us too that he had a special reference to this people in all he ever did either with Christ or by him. Happy and lofty are our feelings when we can believe this, and believe at the same time that among this peculiar people we ourselves have a place, that he had specially us in his mind when he laid the iniquity of a whole guilty world on his Son, specially us in his mind and the promises he had made us, when he raised him from the dead. "I have raised him," he seems to say to us in this text, "because I told you I would raise him. You see him coming forth from his tomb; see in him, if you will, your restored Saviour, your triumphant Redeemer, but see in him too a proof of my faithfulness; think also of me, your everlasting, loving, and covenant-keeping God.

III. We must now look at this event in another light—*it is a joyful testimony borne by the Father to our Lord*, a public acknowledgment of him.

The apostle, you observe, takes this view of it. In mentioning two or three prophecies referring to it, he brings forward, first, this remarkable declaration of Jehovah in the second psalm, applying it to Christ and his resurrection; "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." He thus intimates that his resurrection, while to the church it is the fulfilment of a divine promise, is at the same time a proof to all the world of

our Lord's Messiahship, God's stamp upon him declaring his dignity and greatness and his own delight in him. And it is thus represented continually in scripture. Our Lord, you remember, referred to it again and again as the great proof men were to have of his divine mission. "What sign shewest thou unto us?" said the cavilling Jews to him; and what answer does Christ make to them? "Look to the miracles I am working daily in your streets, or to those I am about to work? my healing the sick, my restoring of sight to the blind, my raising the dead?" No; "I myself shall one day be dead," he says, "and this shall be the sign you shall have—I will rise again. Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "Master, we would see a sign from thee," say the same men to him on another occasion. "There shall no sign be given to this generation," he answers, "but the sign of the prophet Jonas." Again, in this figurative manner, he makes nothing of his wonderful birth and miracles as evidences of his Messiahship; he stakes every thing on his answering to the type Jonah had afforded of him, on his lying three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, the grave, and coming out of it again. And after his resurrection, he seems anxious to establish the reality and truth of it in the mind of his disciples. For forty days he remains on the earth, keeps from his heavenly glory, for no other purpose that we are aware of than this; and during these days he appears repeatedly to his disciples, talks with them, eats and drinks with them, allows his sacred body to be touched by them, giving them, as the scripture says, "many infallible proofs" that he was indeed alive. And their own minds appear to have taken the impress of this. We find them constantly resting all they say concerning him on the fact of his resurrection, appealing to it at every turn. St. Peter presses the Jews with it on the day of Pentecost. St. Paul brings it forward here to his countrymen at Antioch. In the beginning of his epistle to the Romans, he says that Christ was "declared by it to be the Son of God with power;" and in his first epistle to the Corinthians, he lays it down as the foundation on which the whole edifice of Christian faith, and Christian hope and blessedness rests. "If Christ be not raised," he says to his fellow-believers, "your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. And your Christian brethren who are dead, have been miserably deluded; they have perished. And we are deluded, who are still suffering so much for Christ's

sake." "But now," he adds, "is Christ risen from the dead; and our faith, our hope, our suffering, our labour, are not in vain." It is indeed impossible to read the new testament carefully without perceiving that the apostles, the first preachers of Christ's gospel, were willing, like their Master, to rest every thing on the fact of his resurrection, and that in their own breasts every thing did rest on it. They were perfectly satisfied that the event had happened, and having happened, they felt it was an event which established beyond all controversy their Lord's Messiahship, and, with that, the truth of every declaration of his lips and every word of his gospel. Therefore they proclaimed it as glad tidings. They felt that it was a weapon with which they could fight most triumphantly their Master's battles, and they felt too that it was a source of strength and joy to their own hearts.

But still this interpretation does not come up to the full force of this passage. It is its meaning, but surely not all its meaning. "Thou art my Son," says God; and then he adds, "this day have I begotten thee." The Lord seems to speak here as though Christ had now become, for the first time, his Son; had either had no existence before, or no existence in this character. And this serves to shew us the infinite delight God took in him now his work was done, the joy with which he raised him, the pleasure and exultation with which he acknowledged him. "Thou art to me, when thou comest out of that grave, as a new-born Son. I look on thee as a father looks, in the day of its birth, on his first-born." "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," the church is represented as declaring in joy and triumph at the Saviour's birth; and now when the Father raises him from the dead, "My joy," he tells us, "is like that." "This is my Son; this, the Jesus whom you despised and rejected, whom you so lately spat on, and mocked, and scourged, and crucified; he whom you laid in that tomb and thought you had consigned there to oblivion, to rottenness and dust; this is my Son, my beloved Son, and more beloved by me to-day than ever. From this day shall begin to him a new, endless day of glory and joy. His resurrection is to my church as life from the dead; it shall be to him as the beginning of a new existence, the commencement of a life that shall never end."

IV. This scripture places this great event before us in yet a

fourth light—*it is a pledge to us of many blessings*. It is not only in itself a blessing, and therefore a ground of joy, but an assurance to us of other blessings yet to come, and therefore joyful. We gather this from the next prediction the apostle quotes; “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” These words are found in the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, and though they are evidently connected there with a description of gospel blessings, it would scarcely have occurred to us to refer them to our Lord’s resurrection; yet here they are referred to it by an inspired apostle, and it is easy to see how they apply to it.

“The sure mercies of David” are the mercies promised to David, the mercies to which he looked forward, and of which in his writings he often speaks—the day of Christ, the establishment on his throne of David’s seed, the wide spread of his kingdom, and the full blessings of salvation which his people should enjoy. They are called the “sure” mercies of David, partly because they were secured to David by very strong and numerous promises, and partly because David contemplated them as sure, felt certain they would be given. Almost in his dying moments, he spake of the covenant which foretold him of them, as “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.” Now, says the apostle, all this points to the Lord’s resurrection. It must do so, for without his resurrection, none of these great things can come to pass. He cannot sit on his throne, unless he is raised from the grave; he cannot give us these promised blessings, unless he is alive to give them. Here then our fathers had for ages a promise of his resurrection, and now his resurrection has taken place, we, their children, have in it an assurance of every blessing promised. He is raised to give them, and give them he will. We feel now, as we think of his empty sepulchre, or rather as we think of him living and reigning on his throne, that they are indeed the “sure mercies of David;” we shall assuredly have them.

Look back to the history we have read this morning, brethren,—the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. It was not only in itself a great deliverance, and on that account filling their hearts with joy, it was a step towards many other joyful things. The Lord had not brought them out of that wretched land to keep them in the wilderness. He had done it that he might perform the promise given to their fathers, that he might carry them through the wilderness, and plant them in Canaan. Their

miraculous deliverance they must have regarded as a pledge of the speedy accomplishment of all their long-promised and long-looked for mercies. So with us. The resurrection of Christ assures us that all the promises of God connected with Christ will be fulfilled. It is more than a step towards their fulfilment, it is one grand means of fulfilling them. This Saviour is raised, not so much that he may receive honour and glory, sit in happiness on his throne beholding his people saved and his kingdom spread; he is raised that he may himself save his people and spread his kingdom. "He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days," says the prophet, but what does he add? "the pleasure of the Lord," his pleasure in saving and gathering together his elect, "shall prosper in his hand." He himself is to accomplish the number of God's elect, and to hasten his kingdom.

You see then, brethren, how much is involved in the event we are this day commemorating; not simply Christ's own exaltation and glory, but our salvation, the salvation of his whole church. His death left that salvation incomplete. It was a perfect sacrifice for us. Nothing more is wanted on his part nor on our part to expiate our transgressions. The strongest language I could employ would scarcely be strong enough to tell you how completely his precious blood has atoned for them all. It "cleanseth from all sin." So powerful is it, that it washes away the foulest, deepest stains; so extensive, so wide in its influence, that it does not leave the slightest stain on any one believing sinner. But what are we, brethren? Creatures who scarcely care whether we are cleansed or not. Talk of rescued Israel on the shore of the Red Sea, with a wide wilderness to go over before they can get to Canaan—their situation is nothing compared to ours, even though Christ has died for us. We have a far wider and more difficult wilderness to be carried through before we can get to heaven. The way may be open, but who is to lead us into it? who is to guide us along it? who is to protect, feed, strengthen us as we go along? Above all, who is to make us meet for heaven, and give us a heart to enjoy it when we get there? The risen Jesus himself is to do all this for us, and more than this. He is to do it by his Spirit, sending him down, and dwelling by him in our souls. Through that Spirit he gives us faith, works in us the very first act of our minds, which leads us to him; and by the same Spirit he teaches, guides, sanctifies, and upholds us, brings us nearer and

nearer to him, till at last the wilderness is passed and we are with him in his kingdom.

And here, brethren, I must stop. My object has been two-fold—first, to let you see that our Lord's resurrection is not a mere fact to be believed, but something deeply important to us, having a bearing on us; and then that its influence on us is or may be a very happy and joyful one. That it is important to us, all scripture proves. The apostle seems to speak of it here as containing within it the sum and substance of the gospel. In his epistle to the Philippians, he places it side by side with our Lord's sufferings and death. He longs, he says, to be "made conformable to his death," but he longs just as much to "know the power of his resurrection," to feel its power within his own heart. And it is a striking fact too, that except our Lord's death, it is the only event connected with him, of which we have in the church any constant and universal memorial. There is his supper, ordained by himself to "shew forth his death till he come;" there is his own day, the Christian sabbath, kept by his grateful church in all ages of it every where to commemorate his resurrection. Learn to make use then, brethren, both of his death and his resurrection; of his death, that you may be, in your principles, motives, and spirit, conformed to it; of his resurrection, that you may experience its confirming, animating, elevating, purifying, transforming power. O for a practical religion! a religion that brings every thing to bear on ourselves; that makes nothing of its own feelings and doings, but is ever feeling and ever doing; that cannot look even on its dying Saviour or its rising Lord with a mere barren admiration, but is constrained to say, as it looks on him, "What is his precious death to me? and what his glorious, joyful resurrection?" He only can give our religion this character, and till by his Spirit he does give it this character, it is nothing worth. It may commemorate, as the year goes round, his birth and death, his rising again and his ascension, but till it establishes a connexion between us and these events, giving us by a living faith an interest in them, and then, through the same faith, giving them an abiding influence on us, on our hearts and lives, no matter what name it bears or what form it bears, it is not true religion. It may be decorous and it may appear devout, but it is without power, "the power of godliness," and without that, it is without the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and without salvation.

SERMON XXVII.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE RISEN JESUS APPEARING TO MARY MAGDALENE.

ST. JOHN XX. 16.—“Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself and saith unto him, Rabboni.”

THE circumstances attending our Lord's resurrection, are most of them deeply interesting. The great event itself often prevents our minds from resting on them, but no sooner do we attentively examine them, than we are struck with their natural, beautiful, and affecting character. The evangelists themselves seem to have contemplated them with peculiar pleasure, for they have recorded them with unusual minuteness. Among them, that related in the text is not the least interesting. It is the discovery the risen Jesus made of himself at his sepulchre to Mary Magdalene. And this is rendered more remarkable by the fact, that it was the first discovery he made of himself after his resurrection. So St. Mark tells us; “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene.”

That this incident may, through the divine blessing, be made instructive to us, let us consider, first, the conduct of this woman at the time when our Lord thus honoured her, and then the probable reasons which induced him thus to honour her.

I. The first thing we notice in *Mary's conduct* at this time, is *the peculiar love she manifests in it for her Lord*. I say “peculiar,” for though it may not distinguish her at first from the other women who, as St. Mark informs us, accompanied her at this time to the sepulchre, yet it does distinguish her, and most honourably distinguish her, from all the other disciples. They doubtless loved their Master, but now their Master is in

the grave, where are they? Not at his grave. They are concealed somewhere in Jerusalem, sitting together perhaps in some private chamber, talking and speculating together over his fate. But this woman seeks no concealment, she has no heart for speculation. While Peter, and James, and John, are saying, "Our Lord crucified, dead, and buried! what meaneth this? We trusted and we hoped;" Mary Magdalene is on her way to his tomb for the purpose of honouring him.

And mark the time when she set out for his tomb. All the evangelists mention this. It was "early," says John, "early when it was yet dark." "Very early," says Luke. "Very early in the morning, at the rising of the sun," says Mark. "As it began to dawn," says Matthew. For a reason we shall presently see, she could not go before, but the instant she is at liberty, she goes.

And yet her errand required not such haste. An hour or two later would have answered the purpose she had in view, quite as well. She came, St. Mark says, that she might "anoint," that is, embalm him.

And this again was not a needful service. St. John tells us in the preceding chapter, that he had been embalmed before. But it had been done by other hands, and it had been done in haste, and Mary's love is not satisfied; it must be done again with more pains and cost, and she must do it herself. Together with the other women, she "bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him."

This is real love for Christ, brethren. This is loving him as he requires to be loved, with the heart, and all the heart, and soul, and strength; and, in some poor measure, as he deserves to be loved. It is meeting him with a love something like his own wonderful love for us, tender, and self-denying, and never satisfied till it has done all that it can. O how few of us know any thing of such a love! Lord, graft it in our hearts. Kindle in every soul among us a love like this, a real love, for thy holy name.

Notice further in Mary's conduct *her great reverence for the divine commands*.

We have seen her almost impatient to be at her Lord's sepulchre. We are sure from the haste she manifested to be there, that she would have been there before, had not some insurmountable obstacle kept her back. And what was this

obstacle? Nothing more, brethren, than the command you and I have heard to-day, "Remember the sabbath-day to keep it holy." Our Lord, you are aware, was crucified on the day before the Jewish sabbath, and was buried in haste on the evening of that day. "Strong affection," you would have said, had you seen Mary and the other women going away on the Friday night from his sepulchre, "their strong affection for their buried Lord will bring these women back again here to-morrow." But no. "They rested the sabbath-day," St. Luke tells us, "according to the commandment." And it was not Jewish superstition or pharisaic strictness, which led them to do this; it must have been something which God approved, for at the very time that he records their love for his Son, he puts on the same record this reverence of theirs for his holy law, thus marking both with the same approbation.

See here then that a sinner's love for his Saviour, while it is a feeling and a strong one, the very strongest perhaps that is found in the universe out of Jehovah's heart, is yet a governed feeling, a feeling that moves in an humble and holy subjection to God's law. It constrains the soul, it bears along the man who possesses it, but whither? To duty, and difficulty, and, it may be, to suffering, but never to any point or along any path which the Lord has forbidden. Look at some professing Christians—they will break the sabbath at any time, and lead others to break it, and think all well as long as they have what they call a good object in view. How unlike their conduct to Mary's! And look at some young professors of religion—they will fly in the face of friends and parents, they will violate and rudely violate, not only the decencies of social life, but many a precept of the gospel, and wherefore? The love of Christ, they say, impels them. But they know not what they say. The love of Christ moves in harmony with the law of Christ. It is the holiest feeling in the world, while it is the strongest. "If ye love me," says our Lord, "keep my commandments," and love in all its doings remembers his words; it does keep his commandments. "They came early when it was yet dark unto the sepulchre"—there is Christian love, and you admire it, brethren; but "they rested the sabbath-day according to the commandment"—we may well doubt whether that rest is not as much to be admired, nay, whether it does not shew their love as much.

We see also in this woman *an intense and persevering desire to find her crucified Lord.*

Nothing checked her in her search for him, nothing quieted her till she had found him.

Turn to St. Mark's gospel. There was a stone, it appears, at the entrance of the sepulchre, "a great stone," we are told elsewhere, and one that must be removed before Mary and her companions can enter, but this did not deter them; they seem to have been on their way before they even thought of it. And now come again to St. John's gospel. Leaving unnoticed the other women, he confines his narrative to Mary only. He represents her as finding the sepulchre empty. The stone was taken away from it, and the Lord Jesus was gone. Agitated and perplexed, she immediately runs off with the tidings to Peter and John. "They have taken away the Lord," she cries, "out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." Entering at once into her anxiety, these two hasten with her to the tomb, but for what purpose? Evidently for this one purpose, to satisfy themselves that her account was true, that their Master had really disappeared. This done, they are content. "Then the disciples went away again unto their own home." And now where is Mary? Gone away also? No; she is at the sepulchre still. She was there before the disciples came, she returns there with the disciples, and there she remains after they are gone; "she stood without at the sepulchre weeping." She wants Christ, and there where Christ was buried, she stays. "And as she wept," the narrative says, "she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre." How natural was this! Peter and John had looked there before, nay, they had been into the sepulchre and doubtless told her it was empty; but it matters not, she will trust neither of them, nor will she trust herself. Just as when we are searching anxiously for any thing, we seek it again and again where perhaps we have already searched for it in vain, so she looks again and again into this tomb, that she may discover there her beloved Lord.

And now begins to appear the tenderness of that Lord towards her. Never does he suffer one of his weeping people to seek him unnoticed. He first calls down angels from heaven to comfort this weeping Mary. "She seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." But what are angels to her? So

absorbed is she in one pursuit, so completely filled is her mind with one object, that she looks unmoved on this heavenly vision. The suddenness, the strangeness, the splendour, of it disturb her not. They say unto her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" She answers them with as much indifference towards them, as though she were speaking again to Peter and John, and in just the same words. "They have taken away my Lord," she cries, "and I know not where they have laid him."

What an intenseness of desire is here! And yet this is nothing more, or little more, than that man feels, who, like this woman of Galilee, is really seeking for himself Jesus that was crucified. It serves well to picture the feelings and conduct of such a man. Look at Mary. Her desire for Christ was such as was not to be satisfied with meaner things. The company of the holy women who went with her to the sepulchre, would not satisfy her; the company of the disciples, even of those disciples who had been the intimate friends of her Lord, would not satisfy her; no, nor the company of angels. And just so is it with the soul*when, smitten with a sense of its guilt, it is once brought to feel its need of a Saviour, or when, filled with love for him, it is thirsting for the discoveries of his presence. There is an intense longing within such a soul for him. It feels at times as though it could almost fly from itself to reach him. And nothing but Christ can satisfy or quiet this longing. Friends and companions, though the excellent of the earth, will not do; duties and ordinances will not do; angels would not do; nor would heaven itself do, if Christ were not there. "Whom have I in heaven but thee?"—a man really seeking the Lord understands that language: "and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee"—he understands that also. "All the world," he says, "cannot make me happy without my Lord. I am a guilty sinner, and I can know no rest till he has washed and cleansed me. I am comfortless, and I shall be comfortless, till he draws near to comfort me. His favour, his presence, is the life and joy of my heart; while he is absent from me, I must be desolate." If this, brethren, sounds to you overstrained and extravagant, you must deem the conduct of this Mary extravagant; you must look on many passages in holy scripture, especially in the psalms, as extravagant; you must come in truth to this conclusion, that there is something in Christ's religion, which you have never yet experienced or understood;

that it can exercise an influence and power over the human mind, which you have never felt. And what a blessed conclusion, if it excites in you a desire to understand this ! if it leads you to pray that you may feel and experience it ! if it sends you home to-day with this prayer in your heart, " Lord, take me under thy teaching. Shew me the real nature of thy religion. Let me not deceive myself. Be the power of thy grace what it may, O let me feel its power in my inmost soul !"

II. Let us go on now to our second point, *the reasons which induced our Lord to appear first to this woman.*

They were perhaps two.

1. He did it *to display to his church the sovereignty and abounding riches of his grace.*

We know but little of her character. Indeed scripture tells us nothing more of her, than that our Lord had cast out of her seven devils. There is however a tradition that she was the same woman who, with so much beautiful feeling, washed and anointed our Lord's feet in the house of Simon, the pharisee. If this be true, and the conduct and feeling manifested on that occasion are so much like what we find here that it probably is true, she had been a notorious sinner. But even supposing this tradition to be false, she was by no means the person to whom we should have expected our Lord's first appearance to be made. He will go, we should have said, from his sepulchre to the streets of Jerusalem, and shew himself there in triumph to the people who crucified him ; or he will go with eager haste to his beloved disciples, and gladden their sorrowful hearts. But his gospel was intended to be from first to last a dispensation of free, sovereign mercy, and he keeps this design of it ever in his view. On many occasions in his life, he makes his conduct correspond with this character of his gospel. One of his last acts before he died, was to convert and save a guilty malefactor, and now his very first act after his resurrection, is to comfort and honour this humble Mary. He appears first to her to let us see that his grace is sovereign—he will manifest it to whom he pleases ; and that it is free—he often manifests it the most abundantly, where we the least look for it.

And the same principle regulated his conduct at this time towards his disciples. He singles out one above all the others to receive from the women the tidings of his resurrection, and

who is he? The very last we should have thought worthy of such an honour—Peter, the fallen Peter. “Go your way,” said the angels, “tell his disciples and Peter,” Peter especially, Peter before and above all the rest, “that he is risen from the dead.” And this does not satisfy him. To which of all these men does he first appear? To Peter still. “The Lord is risen indeed,” we read in St. Luke, “and hath appeared to Simon.” And St. Paul mentions the same circumstance; “He was seen of Cephas,” another name of Peter, “then of the twelve.”

The Lord Jesus, brethren, delights in thus displaying his sovereignty, not so much that we may admire his sovereignty, as that we may discover in it the freeness and abundance of his grace, and be led by it to seek his grace for our own guilty souls. He is tied by no laws in dispensing his mercy, but his own sovereign will, the will of his own large, merciful heart. O what an encouragement to me to go and cast myself on his mercy! My sins are enormous; they affright me as I think of them; but here is this Saviour singling out transgressors well nigh as great as I am, and singling them out, not for mercy only, but for special favour and honour. O blessed Jesus, look thou on me! Shew me thy mercy, thy free, rich, wonderful mercy; and grant me, as thou hast granted to others like me, thy great salvation.

But we must take another view of this matter.

2. Our Lord doubtless appeared first to Mary, that *he might put honour on her earnest seeking of him, and on her singular obedience and love.*

We speak of his sovereignty, and we ought to speak of it, but the Lord Jesus seldom manifests his sovereignty alone. As we look more closely into what he does, we can generally discover in his doings something beyond it. He shews great favour to great sinners, but he commonly shews along with it his wisdom and faithfulness. We may say that it was the poor, humble Mary, the once sinful, notorious Mary, to whom he first shewed himself alive after his resurrection, and it was so; but we may come again to this history, and say with equal truth, that it was the loving, affectionate Mary, or the conscientious, the seeking, earnest Mary, whom he thus honoured. The same in Peter's case. Would we magnify the grace of Christ? Then we may say, it was the sinful, the cowardly, denying Peter, to whom he sent an especial message by his angel; but would we set forth his faithfulness and truth? We put all this aside; it

was the contrite Peter, we say, the heart-stricken, mourning Peter. And so here. He is shewing himself here a faithful Saviour. He says that he will be found of all them that seek him; and he is found first after his resurrection by her who is the most anxiously seeking him. He said too before he left his disciples, that if any man loved him, he would love that man, and come unto him, and manifest himself unto him. Mary might not have heard his words, but here she is most fervently loving him. At this moment she was probably feeling more love for him, than any other human being in the world. "Here then," says the faithful Jesus, "will I shew that I have not forgotten my promise. My dying words are written on my living heart, and my people shall see that they are written there. I will go and shew myself first to Mary Magdalene. I have called angels down to comfort her, but that has not satisfied her, and it shall not satisfy me. I will meet the desires of her longing soul. She shall see me by her side."

Are you then, brethren, seeking Jesus that was crucified; and seeking him, in some measure, as this Jewish woman sought him? Let this scripture serve to cheer your souls. You may be seeking him weeping, in much distress and perplexity; so did she. You may seem also to have been seeking him a long time in vain; you may look back on weeks, or months, or even years, and yet, you may say, no sight of him, no comforting sense of his presence, have you enjoyed: she too sought him at first in vain. Heavenly messages also you may have had; minister after minister may have declared to you the glad tidings of his salvation; and yet nothing, you may tell us, has brought you any gladness, any solid, abiding consolation; your hearts may still be desolate: this woman likewise, this Mary Magdalene, had more than ministers, she had angels to comfort her, and still she wept. But remember the end. She turned herself at last and saw Jesus standing. For a moment indeed she did not know him. Bewildered with her sorrow, even in his presence she mourned his absence; and so did the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, and so may you; but this does not last long. One word from her Master's lips brings Mary to herself. He calls her by her name, and that was enough. Turning again from the sepulchre whither again she had fastened her eyes, she sees and discerns him; she beholds him living whom she had sought as dead, and in one word gives utterance, the only utter-

ance doubtless she can give, to the wonder and joy of her swelling heart. "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself and saith unto him, Rabboni;" and when before were two words ever uttered, that expressed so much? Perhaps the scene that the sixteenth verse of this chapter paints, was one of the very happiest of all the scenes the earth has known. But there is a happier. The veil which conceals the risen Jesus from our view, will soon be drawn aside, and we ourselves, if we are his, shall see our Lord; and see him, not as we shall see him perhaps to-day at his table, in shadows and emblems, or at the best by his secret manifestations of himself to us by his Spirit, but face to face; see him as Mary saw him, and see him for ourselves and not another. Our names shall be uttered, and uttered in love and kindness—and may I not say, with joy? by his holy lips; and as we hear them uttered, every fear and sorrow of our souls will go; we shall feel ourselves blessed indeed. We shall feel that the desire of our hearts is at last come, and that at last we have all that our souls can wish for, a fulness of joy, a happiness which makes us happy to the full and happy for ever. Mary's joy was soon for a while damped. In the eagerness of her soul, she would have clung perhaps to the knees of her discovered Lord, but he would not suffer her. He had work for her to do among her brethren, and he bids her leave him and go and do it. But our work will be always in our Master's presence; our joy will be never damped. We shall be ever with the Lord, and as near to him as his love can take us.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE MUTUAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST AND HIS SHEEP.

ST. JOHN X. 14.—“I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.”

THE Christian life is described in holy scripture as a hidden life. There are many things in it, which the world never sees or thinks of. And this is one of them—the mutual knowledge that exists between Christ and his people. He knows them, he says, and they know him; and what does the world understand of this? Nothing at all. But you understand it, brethren, something at least of it, if you are Christ's people; and your heart's desire is to understand it better. May the Lord himself be your teacher in this and in all things!

I. Let us look at *Christ's knowledge of his people.*

Were you and I standing for the first time before a flock of sheep, it would never enter our minds that their shepherd knew every one of them; but in eastern countries, if he were a good shepherd, an experienced and faithful one, know them he would. “And that good Shepherd,” says Christ, “am I. That knowledge so unthought of by you and so mysterious to you, I possess. I claim it as one of my excellencies and glories, that I know my sheep.”

He knows *their persons*; not only the number of his flock, but every particular sheep that belongs to his flock. He knows, not only how many of the sons of men the Father has given him, how many of them he has already carried to heaven, and how many are yet to be carried there—of all in heaven and all on earth, he knows every one. “The foundation of God,” says the apostle, “standeth sure, having this seal,” this stamp or in-

scription on the bottom stone of it, "The Lord knoweth them that are his." And turn to Psalm cxlvii. "The Lord doth build up Jerusalem," says the psalmist, in the second verse; "he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel." But how can he do this, we ask, so many are these outcasts, and so separated and scattered? Think, says the psalmist again, of the stars. To you they seem countless. You cannot number them, but God can and God does; "He telleth the number of the stars." And not only so, but he sees each individual star, knows its situation and its character; "He calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord and of great power; his understanding is infinite." So with his people. They are the stars of his spiritual creation. Many of them are too distant for you to behold them; others shine so dimly, that though near you, you do not perceive them; but no distance, no dimness, hides them from Christ. The remotest star, the smallest star, that glimmers in his church, is as well known to him as the nearest and the brightest. Just as he had an infinite mercy to make them his people, so he has an infinite knowledge to recognize them now they are his. Their names are all written in his book of life, nay, they are written on his heart. You and I, brethren, if we are his, are as well known to him as our children are to us, are as readily distinguished by him from all other men, as we distinguish from other men our brothers and friends. He knows his sheep, the number of his people and the person of every one. But this is not all.

He knows *their condition and circumstances*. You may say, "Yes, the general circumstances of his church, the common condition of his people;" but more than this. He is acquainted with the peculiar circumstances and peculiar condition of every soul he has redeemed. He knows all that can be known of it, all that appertains to or concerns it—its sins, that he may pardon them; its diseases, that he may heal them; its wants, that he may supply them; its fears, that he may quiet them; its burdens, that he may give it strength to bear them; and its wanderings, that he may recover it from them. He knows its prayers, that he may grant them; its desires, that he may satisfy them; its graces, that he may delight in them; its services, that he may recompense them. Look at a faithful shepherd among his flock. Were he able, would he not ascertain the condition of every sheep there? Does he not, as he moves about among them,

endeavour to do so? And is our divine Shepherd less careful than he? We may say that "our way is hid from the Lord," but it is not hid from him; "he knoweth the way that we take," every step of it. "He compasseth our path;" he is "acquainted with all our ways." "He understandeth our thoughts," he says; "he searcheth our reins and our hearts;" "the very hairs of our head" he numbers. He is as observant of us and as well acquainted with us, as though we were the only objects of his attention and care. Nay, the scripture assures us that "he was in all points tempted like as we are," and for what purpose? That he might atone for our sins? No, though by his temptations and troubles he did atone for them; it was that he might know us better; that he might have an experimental acquaintance with our condition and circumstances; that he might have that key to a perfect knowledge of us, which fellow-feeling gives.

And does not this, brethren, meet your desires? Does not a knowledge like this endear more to your heart your great Redeemer? If you have passed through much sorrow, you must often have discovered that your kindest friends have not half understood you; there has been a world within you, into which you have not been able to get them to enter; you have felt alone among your fellow-men; and why this? To let you see that human sympathy is, like every thing earthly, imperfect; to force you to turn to Christ as your heart's best counsellor and comforter. He knoweth his sheep. In him is all the knowledge of the heart, the most aching, solitary heart can desire. He is the best of friends, because with the warmest, tenderest love for us, he understands us best.

If we ask how it is that Christ thus knows his people, knows them thus personally and thoroughly, we may trace his knowledge of them, first, to *his great love for them*.

It is plain that the shepherd who most loves his sheep, will generally be found the best acquainted with them. And look at this or that parent sheep in the flock. She knows her lamb by the love for it, which instinct gives her. This love sharpens her eye. She sees one and another peculiarity in her offspring; love impresses these peculiarities on her memory; and place a thousand lambs before her, that sheep would still know her own. So, we may say, is it with Christ. He loves his people, therefore he knows his people. He loves them affectionately, intensely; therefore he knows them well.

And *great intimacy with his people* may be said also to lead to this perfect knowledge of them. In our country, shepherds are comparatively little with their sheep. The flock is secured within folds or fences, and the shepherd frequently leaves them and goes to his home. But in many countries the shepherds for a great part of the year can hardly be said to have a home. They live night and day among their flocks, following them from mountain to mountain, and seeming among the secluded vallies and lonely heights of those mountains, as dead to the world below them as the sheep themselves. And Christ, brethren, dwells with his sheep, takes up his abode with them. He is a Shepherd who is never for one moment absent from his flock. By his spiritual presence he lodges with them every night, and walks with them every day. He calls his church his habitation, he speaks of it as his rest, he dwells in it as his home. And this makes him familiar with his church, and with all its various and changing circumstances; this gives him so complete a knowledge of it. You know well those who have for years shared your house and table. The husband knows his wife, and the parent his child. So the Lord knows his people. They walk with him, and he with them; they abide in him, and he in them; he is in constant intimacy and intercourse with them; familiarity with them brings him acquainted with them.

But all this, you may say, is limiting the Lord Jesus. We will add then one thing more—the Lord Jesus knows his sheep, for *he is none other than the God who knoweth all things*. We may trace his perfect knowledge of us to his perfect Godhead. And this idea seems to have been at this time in his own thoughts. “Does it appear to you,” he seems to say to us, “a wonderful thing that I know my people? As you think of their countless number, and scattered dwellings, and diversified conditions, are you ready to say, how can one eye see or any one mind comprehend them all? I can tell you a more wonderful thing than this. I can understand not only the whole multitude of you finite, petty creatures, but the infinite Jehovah himself, and as perfectly as that infinite Jehovah understands me.” “As the Father,” he adds in the next verse, “knoweth me, even so know I the Father.” This is knowledge indeed. We, brethren, do not half know even ourselves; we do not thoroughly know the nature and substance of any one created thing. As for God, what is our knowledge of him, or the highest archangel’s know-

ledge of him? We know not what to call it. Were we to speak of it as we feel, we should say it is less than nothing. But Christ knows God, all that can be known of him, all that God knows of himself. He has a perfect knowledge of him. We must cease therefore to wonder that he has a perfect knowledge of us. His mind can grasp the mighty ocean; he can fathom its depths and look with one glance over its measureless expanse; surely then the shallow rivulet cannot be too deep for him, nor the drops of the falling rain too great.

II. We may come now to the other part of our subject—*the knowledge which Christ's people have of him.*

"I know my sheep," he says, "and am known of mine." He does not mean by this that his sheep know him as well as he knows them; he means that they all really know him, something of him, and this as no other man does. Their knowledge of him is therefore,

1. *A peculiar knowledge.* Their fellow-men do not possess it, nor at all understand it. You are not only unable to impart it to them, you cannot make them comprehend its nature and character. Its peculiarity consists partly in the truths it receives concerning the Lord Jesus; but it consists still more in the manner in which these truths are received, and the influence they exercise over the mind and heart.

2. The text implies too that it is *an acquired knowledge.* It is not natural to us. Nature does not teach it us. The young sheep knows its mother by instinct, but not its shepherd. So we have naturally no knowledge of Jesus Christ. And mere thought and reflection never bring us to any real knowledge of him, nor of itself does any human teaching. How much have some of you been told of him? You have heard of him perhaps almost every sabbath since you first heard of any thing, and yet, beloved brethren, what do you at this moment know of him? know of him, I mean, in his real character as the power of God and the wisdom of God? as your guilty soul's rest and Saviour? It may be, nothing; no more than the very heathen who has never heard the sound of his name. All real knowledge of Christ is the effect of a special manifestation of him to the soul. Christ, by the power of God, is presented to the soul in a peculiar manner, and the soul then acquires or begins to acquire a peculiar knowledge of him. I do not mean that any thing

new is revealed to it concerning him, any thing beyond what holy scripture contains, but what the scripture does contain is placed before it in a new light, enters the understanding in a new manner, passes from the Bible or the pulpit into our minds and hearts, as though God himself sent it into our minds and hearts; it often surprises us as much and affects us as much, as though the heavens were opened and a new revelation of Christ were made to us; we feel as men who for the first time have seen their Lord.

3. But this knowledge of Christ *is acquired mainly by experience*; it is the result of experience. Some knowledge of him his people get from faith in the testimony of God concerning him. God tells them in his word what Christ is, and they, through the Spirit, understand and believe the testimony he gives them. But the chief spring of their knowledge is often precisely that intimated in the text, that which brings the sheep to know its shepherd. When it has hungered, the shepherd has fed it; when it has wandered, the shepherd has brought it back; when it has not known which way to go on the mountains, the shepherd has guided it; when it has fallen into danger, he has extricated it; wherever it has been, it has seen him near it; it has experienced in numberless ways the shepherd's care and kindness, therefore it knows him. And ask the believer whence has sprung his knowledge of his Saviour? "Under God," he says, "experience has taught it me. I was lost, and my Redeemer found me; I was perishing, and my Redeemer saved me. I have felt his power, and goodness, and love, and grace, O how frequently and blessedly! therefore I know him to be powerful and gracious. I am sure he is wise, for he is often making me wonder at his wisdom in his dealings with me; and I know he is great, for he is glorifying his greatness continually before my eyes, in preserving, delivering, and helping me. As for his holiness, I cannot doubt that; he is often constraining me to feel it in the troubled conscience and the bitter afflictions he sends me. And his all-sufficiency I cannot doubt; it is as clear to me as the noon-day sun. I have never made him my all, but all my wants have been supplied."

And one thing more—

4. This knowledge of Christ is *practical*. The soul that possesses it, is brought in every instance under the influence of Christ: it becomes willing and obedient.

Think again of the sheep. We in this country regard it as a dull, unteachable animal, and our shepherds treat it as such; but in other countries, where it is otherwise treated, it manifests what to us would appear a surprising docility and obedience. Go only into a neighbouring land—the shepherd fearlessly turns his flock on a piece of ground with his neighbour's corn standing unfenced and unprotected on each side of it. He knows that that corn is safe, for he has so trained his sheep, that not one of them will touch it. And look at this chapter. Our Lord alludes again and again in it to an almost universal custom of foreign shepherds. We drive our sheep, they lead theirs. They have only to call them and go before them, and the sheep will follow them, long as their strength lasts, wherever they lead. And so says our Lord of himself; "He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. He goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." He traces, you observe, their following of him to their knowledge of him. "A stranger will they not follow," he adds, "but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers." And so, brethren, it ever is. When we begin to know Christ, we begin to obey him. Before we know him, nothing can rule us; we are as lawless and self-willed as the wild sheep of the mountains. Keep us without a fence from going where we ought not? Alas! scarcely any fences can be found strong enough to keep us in; we break through any thing. And as for following at our Master's call his blessed footsteps, we will roam the desert first, dreary and barren as the desert is. But let the soul once experience Christ's grace and love, and through that experience get a spiritual knowledge of Christ, it says then, "O let me follow him for ever!" It becomes docile and tractable, yielding and subdued. It no longer wants the whole wilderness to roam in, to go this way and that, where its own corrupt inclinations would lead; all it wants is to go straight on, to follow Christ to heaven. A wonderful change, brethren, passes on such a soul. It is no more like what it once was, than a wild animal is like a disciplined, trained, and domestic one.

And what a beautiful picture does this image give us of the church of Christ! It is not a flock of half wild sheep, running hither and thither, kept together with difficulty, and driven on to their destined home with blows and shoutings; no, their Shepherd is before them, and they know him; they keep him in

sight; and, like a willing flock, they quietly follow him. Now and then there is a halting among them; one falls down here, and another there; one is bleeding from some wound he has received, and another is going on faint and weary through nature's weakness; but still the flock does go on, and when their journey is ended and their number is counted, how many has the Shepherd lost? A spectator would have said as he saw them toiling along across that desert, or up those heights, or through those dark and dangerous vallies, "There will be thousands lost," but the great Shepherd himself says, "Not one. Here they are, all whom my Father entrusted to me, every one of the sons of men who ever committed himself to my care and keeping. Here they are, and here they shall be through a long, endless summer, one happy flock under one happy Shepherd, my happy people under me their happy Saviour."

Brethren, do you thus know Christ? Have you this soul-subduing, practical knowledge of him? this peculiar, heaven-taught, experimental acquaintance with him? Then go back to the first part of this text, and remember for your comfort that Christ knows you. We do not half understand the power of these common, simple truths of the gospel. In our search for novelty, we are often like men leaving an open mine with the richest ore in it, and digging into other mines, which after we have dug into them, may not prove so rich. But would we fasten our minds on these truths, and pray to God to unfold them to us, O how rich, and precious, and cheering, should we often find them! This simple truth, "The Lord knoweth them that are his. If I am one of his, he knoweth me"—there is enough in this to make a man feel in his utmost weakness, firm as a rock; and in his greatest perils and his darkest troubles, safe as an angel. The God of peace has brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, brought him from the dead and raised him on high in the character of their Shepherd. O let me be once numbered among the sheep, once return unto him the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, and what shall harm me? There is not a creature in the universe more secure than I am, nor one who in the end will be more blessed.

SERMON XXIX.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE DIVINE COMMANDMENTS SOURCES OF PEACE.

ISAIAH XLVIII. 18.—“O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments ! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.”

THERE is a class of Christians in almost every congregation, who are frequently complaining of their want of holiness and their want of peace. They are comfortless, they say, and falling continually into sin ; and this troubles them. Now here, in this text, the Lord addresses men of this class. He tells them that they have reason to be troubled. Instead of comforting them, he seems to mourn and complain with them. And to aggravate their distress, he tells them that they have brought it on themselves ; that it might all have been avoided ; that had they been so minded, they might have been at this moment very peaceful and holy. And his words are true, brethren. The Lord grant that some of us may this day feel their truth !

I. They point out to us *the conduct these men ought to have pursued* ; “O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments !”

By his “commandments,” the Lord means his holy law, all of it, every precept he has given us of every kind.

To these we are to “hearken ” or listen. The word imports that God is sounding his commandments every moment in our ears, and calling our attention to them. And he really is doing so. By writing his law in his word, and putting his word into our hands, he is speaking continually to us from heaven. No burning mountain shakes before us, no dark cloud overshadows us, no lightnings blaze, but there lies the law of the great Jehovah written before us ; he speaks to us in it as really as

though he were now thundering on Sinai, and we trembling in the wilderness at its foot.

But what does this hearkening to God's commandments mean? Certainly something more than a mere reading of them.

It means *a close attention to them*. A listening man is a man in an attitude of attention. He is not one who happens to hear a sound as he is passing along intent on other matters; he is one who stands still to hear, and gives his thoughts to what he hears, and ponders it.

Hence we may say, this hearkening implies further *an understanding of God's commandments*. Plain as they are, they are often misunderstood, sometimes almost wilfully so. Very few of us try to understand them. They go farther and come more closely home than we wish, and we had rather keep a veil over their meaning, than have it made plain and clear. But God calls on us here to rise above this feeling; to look at his commandments as his commandments really are; to view them in all their spirituality of meaning and all their broadness of extent; to say of them, "They aim at my heart; they claim a dominion over my inmost feelings and thoughts. My words and actions, were all my words and actions conformed to them, would not meet their demands. They are a law for my mind. I must give them the obedience of my soul."

And to do this, there must be also *a remembering of God's commands*. I do not mean a consciousness when we are told of it, that this or that precept stands in his word, but such a placing of every precept in our memories, as causes it often to recur to us, whether we are told of it or not; a frequent remembrance of it, grounded on a familiar acquaintance with it. David well expresses this when he says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart." And this too is a part of what the blessed Saviour means when he says to his Father, "Thy law is within my heart."

And one thing more—this hearkening to God's commands implies *a regarding of them as commands*. Here again many of us are greatly wanting, and almost without knowing that we are. It has pleased God to reveal himself to us in his word under many very gracious characters, such as our Father, our Guide, our Friend; and moreover to adopt language in speaking to us, harmonizing with these characters. His commands consequently often assume the form of invitations, advice, expositu-

lations, and even entreaties. Now we in our folly abuse this condescension. We forget who he is, that thus counsels and beseeches us. The authority, the majesty, the awful holiness, of Jehovah are lost sight of in his love. And then comes in sometimes the mischievous notion, that the work of Christ has in some way or other altered God's law, or else loosened our obligation to obey it. In vain does God tell us that he had rather suffer the heavens and the earth to pass away, than alter one jot or tittle of it; in vain does he say that his gospel establishes it, and was intended to establish it; in vain does he every where declare that the final end of all the Saviour has suffered and done and is doing still, is to conform us to it; we cannot get rid of the idea that we need not be conformed to it, that we are set free from it, that in our case, not only its curse, but its authority is gone. When God therefore calls on us to hearken to his commandments, he bids us lay aside these delusions. He calls on us to look on him in his forgotten character of our Lawgiver. He seats himself on the throne of his glory, takes up the sceptre of his majesty, points to the everlasting law that his own holy hand has written, and bids us and the whole earth tremble before him.

II. The text shews us *a blessed result of this conduct when pursued*. This, it says, is peace; and by peace it undoubtedly means inward peace, peace of mind. Our business then must be to enquire how this effect is produced.

All true happiness comes from God. He is the spring of it. Flowing out of his holy and glorious perfections, it rises up in him, as water rises in a fountain; and it dwells in him, as water dwells in a mighty sea. For us therefore to partake of it, we must be brought near to God; and for us to partake largely of it, we must be made in some measure like God. And in both these ways, does this hearkening to his commands bring us peace.

1. *It leads the soul to Christ, the great Prince of peace.*

We cannot keep God's law in remembrance, not at least if we rightly understand it, without having continually forced on our minds a conviction of our own sinfulness and danger. "There is a command; it is the living God's; it is addressed to me. It says there is ruin, there is death, for me if I disobey it. I have disobeyed it, and that a thousand times. And what awaits me?"

“Why,” answers the soul, “if I stand still, death awaits me; it will overtake me. I must fly anew then to my great Deliverer; I must betake myself again to him who only can save me. This guilty conscience, these tormenting fears, must be quieted; and where can I find quiet under them, but in the cleansing blood of my precious Lord?” The law thus becomes in fact a source of comfort. It speaks of danger; it excites fear; this fear drives the soul anew to its refuge and hiding place, and there it rests. It finds not only security in it, but consolation, and consolation arising out of a sense of its security. Its Saviour thus becomes its Comforter. It feels itself as safe in him, as love, and faithfulness, and omnipotence, can make it; and this feeling is unutterably joyous to it and sweet. You, brethren, who have never known what a deep consciousness of sin is, can form no conception of what it is to find a Saviour from it. A refuge from a storm, water in a desert, food when starving, a life-boat in a wreck, are not more valued. They could not thrill your souls with a livelier joy.

2. Conduct like this *leads us to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter*; and thus also proves a source of peace.

We cannot hearken to God's commands in the way I have described, without seeing that we must obey them. A conviction will gradually take possession of our minds, that our former notions on this point have been altogether wrong; that though we had forgotten it, we are really under the authority of the great King of heaven, and must conform ourselves in heart and life to his sovereign will. And no application to Christ for mercy, no sense of safety in Christ, no joyful hope in him, will weaken this conviction. The soul, as it looks out from its hiding place, sees its great Lawgiver still on his throne, and his law shining unchanged above him. “I am safe,” it says, “from condemnation. No curse can fall on me here, no evil harm me; but the voice of my God is still the same to me, as before I came here. It still bids me be holy. It still says to me, that unless I am so, I can never enter into his kingdom or share his joy. And my Deliverer himself tells me the same. I cannot remain unholy, he says, if I abide in him. I must give up my sins, or give him up. If I do not cast them away, he will cast me away. And all this I feel to be true and right. Something within me speaks the same language. I feel that holiness is needful for me, as needful for my happiness as Christ himself

for my safety." Accordingly the soul begins to labour after holiness. It tries with its utmost power to obey the commandments it is hearkening to. And what is the result? Every one who has made the attempt, can say. Disappointment is the result, failure, a startling discovery of inward corruption and weakness. We find out that the soul's power is gone, as well as its innocence; that we can do nothing; that sin has done more than make us criminal, it has tied and bound us in fetters we cannot break; it has polluted every corner of the soul, and left it a sad, pitiable, helpless, mass of corruption. In this state, such a soul as we have in view, cannot rest. It abhors and hates it. "I must get out of it," it says. "I cannot bear it. I must be holy or wretched."

And now there opens itself before it another pathway to peace. It hears of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier. It goes to him to sanctify and cleanse it; and in him also it finds consolation. He is the appointed Comforter of the church, and though the soul does not go to him perhaps in the first instance for comfort, it finds comfort in him, it draws comfort out of him. If he does nothing more for it, he helps it in its conflict with sin and with itself, and that brings it peace.

In the former case, we had the law, then a sense of guilt, then Christ the Saviour from guilt, and so peace; here, in this case, we begin the same and end the same, but the process is different; first the law, then a sense of pollution and weakness, then the Holy Spirit the Sanctifier, then a drawing near to him, and so again peace.

3. Peace flows from hearkening to the divine commands, in yet another way—*they gradually make us holy, and holiness leads to peace.*

We often conceive of spiritual happiness as of something existing independently in the mind; independently, I mean, not of God, but of any thing else in the mind. This however is not the case. Generally speaking, the peace which is found in the Christian's heart, grows out of something else which God has put into the Christian's heart. It is the fruit of that grace and holiness, the result of those pure and heavenly dispositions, which are wrought within him by the Holy Ghost.

Holiness is the root of happiness. It contains within itself the germ, the elements and materials, of it. Hence the Lord says, "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect

of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever." "The kingdom of God," says St. Paul, coupling the same two things together, "is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Now we become holy partly by studying God's law. As we study it, we begin to form correct ideas of holiness, to discover the beauty and excellency of it, to have our desires and efforts after it strengthened, to gain possession in some degree of the thing itself. The heart gradually becomes holy, and becoming holy, it becomes serene and happy.

And mark, brethren, how strongly this is expressed in the text. It is not our peace, that we are promised shall be as the waves of the sea, if we hearken to God's commands; it is our righteousness; and yet doubtless our peace is meant. The one word is used for the other. The two things are identified in the divine mind. God means to say, "Hearken to my commands, and your righteousness shall be as the waves, and that shall make your peace also as the waves."

III. And this brings us to a third part of the text—*the extent of that blessed effect spoken of in it*. Here is more than peace promised us, here is a river of peace, yea, an ocean of it; "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

The figure conveys the idea of *abundance*. The Christian's peace, it says, shall not enter his soul by drops, or flow through it as a scanty and shallow rivulet. There shall be a tide of peace, a wide and deep stream of it, passing into his soul. It shall pervade his soul, reaching every faculty, and thought, and feeling, in it. His understanding, his affections, his will, his whole mind, shall be at rest, and, in the end, perfectly at rest. The waters shall be deep, as well as broad. Thus this prophet speaks elsewhere of the "perfect peace" of the believer; and David, of his "great peace." "The peace of God," we read, "passeth all understanding." It not only exceeds our comprehension in its nature, we can set no bounds to its extent. We cannot tell how peaceful God can make us. There is an abundance of peace for us, for there is God's own peace for us, that which reigns over and keeps tranquil his own mighty mind. We often wish for the peace of this Christian friend, or the

quiet of that Christian neighbour. "O," we say, "that we were as calm in our troubles and vexations as he!" "But what is that?" says Christ. "Here is my peace for you, a calmness like my own. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you."

There is another idea suggested by this figure—*constancy*, perpetuity.

A river is, in most cases, a permanent thing. Not like an occasional torrent which rushes down from the mountain to-day and disappears to-morrow, nor like a lake which the rains have formed, and which will dry up when the rains are over, a river flows on day after day and year after year, deeper at one time than another and more rapid and wide, yet never exhausted, rolling on the same throughout all generations. So that peace of which this text speaks, is a permanent, established thing. As long as the believer hearkens to God's commandments, it reigns over his soul, and keeps it, if not in an unbroken, yet in an abiding calm.

I do not mean that the state of his mind is always the same, or his happiness always unalloyed and abundant. Trace a river from its source to its mouth, and there is generally an almost endless variety in its course and appearance. It is now half hidden in a narrow channel among mountains and forests, and now spread over a wide bed, conspicuous in the plain; and then again it is seen contracting and deepening itself, and moving onwards with tenfold velocity and strength. And look at the Christian's peace—it seems to vary as much. It often changes with the changing scenes and circumstances in which he is placed. It sometimes nearly disappears; the man himself perhaps thinks it quite gone; but after a while, it breaks forth again he scarcely knows how, and surprises and gladdens him. He is never wholly without it while walking in the paths of God's commandments, and never will be. He may at times be distressed, he may be sorrowful, but this peace will allay his distress, it will bear him up in his sorrow. It exists and may generally be discovered in his darkest hours.

And further—*increase* also is included in this promise, an increase of peace.

A river is not formed at once. If we go to its head, it is generally a mere thread of water, scarcely perceptible through the grass and rushes among which it is running. But as it

flows on, other streams fall into it; it widens and deepens; and the farther it flows, the more enlarged it becomes, till it loses itself at last in the depths of the ocean. And there is clearly this idea of increase in the text. The peace it promises, is at first a river, but immediately afterwards, under another name, it is described under another figure—it is as deep and boundless as the waves of the sea. And the description is true.

There is not much peace in the sinner's heart, when his attention is first fixed on God's commands; no, not even when he hopes that he has found in Christ pardon for his transgressions of them. There is sometimes a good deal of joy at such seasons—it would be strange if there were not—but there is much of natural feeling in this joy, and it is seldom abiding. It is not what he himself, in a later period of his course, would call peace. True, solid peace is generally at first small; it is hardly perceptible amid the fears and perplexities with which the soul has to struggle; but as the soul goes on listening to the divine commandments, applying to the Saviour for pardon and to the Comforter for strength, and gradually becoming moulded more and more into the divine image, peace flows into it in a more copious stream, the sources of peace are multiplied, and, at the same time, the soul's capacity to receive and hold it is increased. And all this, unless God's ways are forsaken, goes on to the last. New springs of consolation burst open in every stage of our progress, old sources of comfort become richer and sweeter; our peace consequently flows deeper and deeper, till it ends in an ocean of peace, the boundless, fathomless ocean of everlasting joy.

We have now gone through the text. There are two points clearly established by it.

This is the first—*there is no true peace of mind for us, without a high reverence for God's commands.* There is no peaceful enjoyment of the gospel, without a holy regard for the law.

We are very prone to set these two things at variance, to look on the one as opposed to the other. God never does so. Justification by the law, he tells us indeed, is altogether out of the question. A criminal might as well appeal to the statute that condemns him, for a pardon or a reward. But in every

other point of view, the law and the gospel go hand in hand. They come from the same God; they manifest, though not in an equal degree, the same goodness; they aim at the same merciful end, our happiness; they both unite one with the other in effecting it. I will not say that neither of them alone can make us happy. Some of you feel however that the law cannot. You have a wounded conscience, and the law will not heal it. You have a troubled soul, and the law speaks no peace to it. Now this text is not addressed to men like you. You have hearkened to God's commandments, and O bless him every day you live that he has led you to do so! You are not to forget them, but you are not to look to them for hope and consolation. It is in the gospel, in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, that your comfort lies. The lamentation of God over you, if he lamented at all, would be, "O that they would hearken to my promises! O that they would receive my mercy! O that they would rejoice in my well-beloved Son!"

Others of you find but little peace in the gospel. It does not satisfy, perhaps it disappoints you. The joy it once gave you is gone, and you are disquieted and comfortless. To such as you, God speaks particularly in this text. You want perhaps encouragement from him; you are looking for peace to come again into your hearts from some promise, or from some new and clearer light thrown by him on some privilege of his gospel, or from some fresh assurance vouchsafed you of your special interest in his love. But not one word of this kind does this text contain. "I," he says in the preceding verse, "am the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." And now what follows? In what way does he bid you go, that you may once again obtain peace? In that which, of all ways, seems the least likely to restore it to you; "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!" It is our forgetfulness of his law, he tells us, that keeps peace from us, our undervaluing and neglect of it. It is hard to believe this. It seems like sending us to the snow for warmth, or into darkness for light. But God is wiser than we. He knows where happiness lies better than we know; and if not, he will do all things in his own way; he will give us nothing except we get on the ground whereon he has

appointed us to stand. No matter what that ground is, how apparently barren and desolate and unpromising, there we must go if we would have his mercy, and there we must remain till his mercy comes. In this case, he sends you to the law and the commandments. You have forsaken them, brethren, yes, practically forgotten or despised them, or you would not be what you are. There is something wrong in your heart; something wrong perhaps in your life also; and that is the hindrance which keeps comfort from you. You may not think so. You may be ready to think that the fault lies elsewhere. So this very people thought; but the prophet undeceived them. "Behold," he says to them, "the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you."

This then is one truth you are to learn to-day, that you must honour the law in order to find peace in the gospel. And this is the other—*no matter what our character or state may be, the great God of heaven is full of compassion towards us.* We find him addressing here a rebellious people, speaking to them of his despised commandments, and lamenting and mourning; and why? Because his authority is spurned and his name dishonoured? No; because that rebellious people are comfortless; because the sinners who have trampled on his commands, have lost the blessedness they might have found in obeying them. His authority as a Sovereign is not laid aside, he still sits on his throne; but he does not speak as a Sovereign; he takes up a lamentation over them as a father over a disobedient and foolish child; "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! How happy wouldst thou have been!" And when he first gave his Israel his law, he used language concerning them of similar import. "O that there were such an heart in them!" he said, and said it amid the thunders of Sinai; "that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always;" and still for the same reason—"that it might be well with them and with their children for ever." His own glory seems overlooked by him in his desires for his people's happiness. And what does this shew us? That even in our departures from him, he pities us. Polluted as we may be, and dishonoured and wounded, he is ready to take us again to his favour. He could consume us in a moment. All heaven would

glorify his justice, were he this moment to destroy us for ever ; but his thoughts towards us are still thoughts of peace and not of evil. If we are willing to return, he is willing to receive us, as willing to receive us and shew us mercy, as he was at first. The same way to him yet stands open. The same fountain for sin and uncleanness is within our reach. "Return, O backsliding Israel," is still his call to us ; "return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

SERMON XXX.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

CHRIST THE HOPE OF GLORY.

COLOSSIANS I. 27.—"Christ in you, the hope of glory."

WHAT a crowding together in these few words of high and blessed things ! They form part only of a sentence, but we need not look farther. There is enough in them for the longest sermon that man or angel could ever preach.

Here is, first, glory ; then, the hope of glory ; then, Christ the hope of glory ; and then, to crown the whole, Christ in us, the hope of glory. O may the great King of glory lift up our hearts to his kingdom and himself !

I. Here is *glory*. It is another word for heaven. But why call heaven by a name that sounds at first so light and empty ? There are two reasons to be given.

One is, it is a name that well sets forth *the excellence of heaven*.

Glory is a high degree of praise and admiration. Earthly glory is not worth the having, because the men of the earth do

not estimate things according to their true value. They often praise and admire that which is really worthless. But suppose a right measure to be taken of things, then, it is clear, glory will be a proof of value. Nothing will be esteemed glorious, which is not of transcendent worth. Common excellence may claim our approbation, but glory is a higher word, and to merit that, there must be excellence of the highest kind. The ancient Jews felt this; the same word in their language, that is used for glory, signifies also weight and substance. When therefore the apostle speaks of heaven as a glorious world, he means that it is a world of real, solid good. He means that it rises far above all other worlds in substantial excellence; that it is not only to be admired, but if we weigh it with the whole universe, with perhaps the ten thousand times ten thousand worlds of light and joy which are moving round the throne of Jehovah, it transcends and outweighs them all: they are all lightness, mere dust, in comparison with it. Hence in another place, with this very idea evidently in his mind, he calls heaven "an exceeding weight of glory."

But this word sets forth also *the magnificence of heaven*.

Mere excellence, however great, will not of itself make a thing glorious. It must be excellence which is known and seen. The sun is at all times a splendid object, but for men to discover and admire its glory, it must rise up in a cloudless sky and blaze forth. A diamond has no glory while lying buried in its native rock; we begin to praise it, when it is brought forth, and polished, and we see its beauty. And so here. The glory of heaven comes from the excellency that is in heavenly things, discovering itself. The Father in his infinite majesty—Christ in his grace and love—holiness in its perfection and beauty—the angels in their purity—the saints chosen of God and precious, laden with the riches of salvation, and shining in their robes of light;—all these are hidden from us here, or half hidden; the eye of faith but dimly discerns them through clouds and distance; but there is no distance, there are no clouds or veils, in heaven. Things will appear there to us as things are, in all their perfection and excellence, yes, even our great Lord himself. "Thine eyes," says Isaiah, "shall see the King in his beauty." "We shall see him as he is," says John; "face to face," says Paul.

Well therefore may heaven be called by this emphatic word,

"glory." It is transcendentally the most excellent of all worlds, and at the same time the most magnificent. It is a mine of the richest gold all laid open and exposed.

II. Let us look now at a second thing in the text—*the hope of glory*. And this brings us down to the earth, but still with heaven in our sight.

Next to glory itself, this hope of glory is the most blessed thing we can ever have. Nothing on this side heaven is so sweet or joyful. But what is it? There is a hope, and a hope of heaven too, which is not worth the having. We read in scripture of a hope that perishes; of a hope that shall be "cut off," suddenly ended; of a hope that is like a spider's web, easily torn and swept away; and of another hope still that is like "the giving up of the ghost." And the hope, brethren, that is in our hearts, may be of this kind. A God of love perhaps could shew us no greater mercy than to dash it this moment to the ground. "What," you may say, "send us to our homes hopeless?" I answer, Yes, hopeless. A false hope is worse than none at all, far worse. There may be mortification and pain in parting with it, but what is there in keeping it? Misery and death everlasting. May the living God save you from such a curse!

But how may a true and blessed hope be distinguished from this? By three marks.

1. *It comes down from heaven.*

It is not natural to us. We cannot of ourselves, by any power that we possess, acquire it. No fellow-creature can of himself reason or persuade us into it. It is the gift of a heavenly Spirit, a peculiar work of God the Holy Ghost in the heart. And consequently it is never found except in the renewed heart. No unrenewed man can possibly have it for this reason—every such man is without those things whereby the Holy Spirit works and produces it. It is like holiness and love, the fruit of faith; of faith in God's promises made to a world of sinners in Christ Jesus. It very much resembles faith, resting on the same foundation and exercising itself on the same objects; and yet it differs from it. Faith believes the promise, hope looks forward to the fulfilment of it. "There is a world of glory," says faith, "for pardoned sinners, for all who are washed and cleansed in the blood of Christ." "I am going to that

world," says hope ; "that glory will be mine." Faith discovers the treasure, hope rejoices in the expectation of gathering it up.

2. Hence take another mark of it—*it really longs for and looks for heaven.*

You often hear of a dead faith, brethren ; but what more common than a dead hope ? A worldly man's hope of heaven is in most cases no hope at all. It does nothing in his mind. Often for days and weeks together, he is not even conscious that it is there ; he cannot be, for it is not there ; it does not exist. At the best, it is a notion and nothing more. But a godly man's hope is an active thing. It is really hope ; a something within him which contemplates, and desires, and anticipates, the heaven before him. You know how hope works within you, when you are looking forward to a meeting with some dear child or friend ; it will work in just the same manner when it exists within you as a hope of glory. It is an "earnest expectation," St. Paul says ; and the word he uses, signifies a stretching forward of the head, an anxious effort to discern some wished for object. He seems to have in his thoughts some shipwrecked mariner looking through mist and storm for the coming life-boat ; or some other mariner, wearied with the ocean's tossings, striving to descry in the distance his native land.

3. And then this hope has another mark—*it carries the soul on towards heaven, and makes it meet for it.*

Of all the graces of the Spirit, we expect perhaps the least spiritual good from this. We regard it as the sweetener of our Christian life, rather than as any very useful or vital part of it. But St. Paul frequently couples it with faith and love, and represents it as equally important. There is scarcely setting any bounds to the view he gives us of its importance. It is the helmet, he says, by which we bear some of the worst blows of Satan in the day of conflict ; it is the soul's anchor, by which it rides safely and peacefully amid storms and perils. We rejoice in hope, when perhaps we have nothing else to rejoice in ; and when at last we are saved, it is hope, we are told, that saves us. Take away hope from the believer, you have made him not only a miserable man, but one who soon loses, in his troubles and temptations, all resemblance to a child of God. He may be in the way to heaven, but the weight of a feather is too much for him, it bears him down ; and a mere whisper from Satan or the world will turn him aside.

I said too, that this grace makes the soul meet for heaven. This is its highest excellency—it is a purifying thing. It brings the soul more than any other grace within the holy influence of heavenly things, for it brings it nearer to them. Hence St. John says, “Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself.” And mark his language. He says not, such a man is willing for God to purify him; he is willing to be taught and disciplined and afflicted, to go through any trials however distressing, or into any furnace however hot, that he may be cleansed and refined;—he says, he purifieth himself; he is a man aiming at holiness; working, labouring for it; and the highest degree and measure of holiness—“he purifieth himself even as God is pure.” This is indeed a hope worth the having—a hope that not only comes from heaven and looks forward to heaven, but makes us heavenly. The apostle calls it a “blessed hope,” and every one of you, who knows any thing of it, feels it to be blessed. “Lord,” you say, “give me more and more of this heavenly grace day by day. Thou art the God of hope. O fill me with all joy and peace in believing, that I may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

III. Here is a third object in the text—*Christ*. And he, observe, is described in it as connected, not with glory, but with hope, the hope of glory. The apostle calls him this hope itself. And his meaning is, that he is the foundation of our hope; that all true hope of heaven rests on him; that take him away, the man whose heart is full to overflowing with this hope, would have within him no hope at all. He identifies Christ with hope, just as old Simeon in the temple identifies him with salvation, calling him not a Saviour, but salvation itself. But why is this?

1. *Christ has purchased glory for us.*

It is not our birthright. We have naturally no more claim to it than the beggar has to a monarch's crown. Nay, as sinners and rebels against God, we were farther from it than any beggar can be from any crown. We were in the condition of criminals, convicted, sentenced, and about to be cut off. But the Lord Jesus comes in between his people and offended justice. By the shedding of his own precious blood, he purchases a pardon for them, and by his spotless obedience in their form and stead, heaven. He is our hope because, with the one hand, he has paid for us the ransom which delivers us from condemnation, and, with the other, laid down the price which entitles us to glory.

2. *And he has actually taken possession of glory for us.* As a dying Saviour he purchased it, and then, rising again, he went up to heaven, and said, as he entered it, of all its riches and all its splendours, "These are mine; mine now, not as the great Lord of all things, but mine as the triumphant Son of Man. They are mine as the Head of my ransomed church. Many of my people have yet to suffer in that world of sin; many more are as yet unborn; ages will pass away before these places in my Father's house, and these thrones, are all filled; but there—I write my name and my people's name on these places and thrones, and they shall be as surely theirs, as my name is holy or my power vast." This apostle accordingly connects the believer's hope with his Lord's ascension. It is "the anchor of his soul," he says, "which entereth into that within the veil;" that is, into the unseen and holy heavens, "whither," he adds, "the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus." His hope goes forward into heaven, because there his great High Priest is gone.

3. *Christ has pledged himself to bring believers in him to glory;* therefore also he is the hope of glory to them.

A father may purchase a splendid estate for his son and secure it to him, but if that estate is in some distant land, and that son a poor miserable wanderer, without the means of traversing the seas and continents which lie between him and his inheritance, it will do him no good; his father's love and care will both be wasted. And our condition, as we think of heaven, often appears to us too much like this.

A very little real faith in Christ makes a man feel sure that his blood has opened heaven for sinners, and that he has power and grace enough in heaven to admit into it whomsoever he pleases; but what does Christ say? "He that endureth to the end, shall be saved;" and that endurance, that stedfast perseverance—O how the soul is sometimes cast down as it thinks of it! "We never can endure to the end," we say. "We are falling and sinking already. Were glory near us, we might find strength to reach it, but it is far away. Deserts and mountains, labours and sufferings, snares and enemies, lie between us and it. We shall never see it." But here again comes forward the great Saviour. "Look at that glorious heaven," he says. "I have purchased it for you, and hold it for you; it is yours. And now look at yourselves. I have purchased you for heaven; nay rather, for myself. And will I lose you? Never. All that

secures heaven to you, secures you to me. My hold on you is as firm, as my hold on my crown and throne. Are you mine? Then you shall be kept by my power through faith unto salvation. Are you the sheep of my fold? my willing and obedient, though weak and defenceless sheep? Then my sheep shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand. Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure, and it is my stedfast determination, to give you the kingdom. Yet a little longer I will guide you with my counsel, and afterward receive you to glory."

IV. "But all this," some of you may say, "is foreign to the purport of the text. It is not Christ on the cross nor Christ in heaven, that is said to be the hope of glory to us, but Christ in us." And in turning to this our last point, I would observe that we must not so interpret the apostle's words, as to make them contradict any thing you have already heard. If we speak of the foundation or ground of a sinner's hope before God, then it is nothing at all within him. It is Christ without him. It is God's everlasting Son, leaving his throne, lying in a manger, dying on a cross, reigning in heaven. Here rests every godly man's hope, here and no where else; and every godly man will say, "Here let it rest. O my incarnate, my dying, living Lord, be thou more and more my trust and stay." But still the apostle says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." What does he mean?

By his being in us, he means more than we can tell. The expression implies, not only that Christ draws near to us, coming to our side as a friend or companion might do; but that he actually enters, in some spiritual way, into our souls, as no earthly friend can do, living, dwelling within us, making us as it were his temple, and loving to do so. And thus abiding in us, he becomes our hope, because his being in us is the best evidence we can have of our being his.

Picture to yourselves a house and a miserable one, gloomy, filthy, and comfortless within, and falling to decay. Let a stranger enter that house, he may act in two ways. He may secrete himself in some dark corner within its wretched walls, and, watching his opportunity, do much mischief without its inhabitants even knowing he is there. Thus Satan is acting in the hearts of thousands, who little think he is near them, much less within them.

But suppose that stranger to be a man of another character, and to act in another way. Suppose him, as soon as he goes in, to throw open the windows of that house, and to let in the air and light. See him then discovering himself to the inhabitants of it. "I am come to live with you," he says, "if you will let me, as your friend and brother. I will do you much good. But this filthiness I cannot bear, nor this disorder. I am a happy being too, and wherever I am, I love comfort, and cheerfulness, and joy." And then he sets about cleansing that house, putting it in order, adorning and repairing it, strengthening its walls and closing up every fissure in them, so that when the wintry storm beats, no wind or rain can enter it, and nothing shake it. And then while he is doing this, he goes about enlivening it with his presence, and making the voice of joy and praise to be heard from day to day in every room of it. O, you would say, what an altered house! What a blessed guest has that man proved in it!

Now how does the Lord Jesus act when he enters a sinner's heart? Exactly thus. He does not, like Satan, hide himself in it; but he reveals himself to the sinner, and works within him, and changes his once unclean, dreary heart, and makes him a holy and happy man. "Behold," he says, "I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." "I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." "Then," he says again, "will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." It is natural then for such a man to speak of Christ within him as his hope of glory. "I know he is here," he says, "for a change has been wrought here, that none but he could work. He has softened a heart that was hard as iron; he has purified a soul that was nothing but uncleanness; he has put in order a mind that was all confusion; and, blessed be his name! he has brought peace to a breast which never knew real peace before. And if he has done all this for me, am I not his? If he has thus taken possession of me as his own, am I not his own? He deals thus with none but his redeemed, and surely if he deals thus with me, I am among his redeemed. Yes, vile as I am, Christ liveth in me, and while he does live there, transforming and sustaining me, I may and I will call him my Saviour. I will hope to see his face in the heavens, and to share his joy."

And this, brethren, I conceive, is the apostle's meaning. I say again, the work or presence of Christ within us is not the foundation of our hope. If we at any time make it such, our hope languishes; we are soon taught by the clouds that come over us, that something is wrong; but though not the foundation of our hope, it is a proof that our hope is resting on a good foundation, and it thus strengthens and animates that hope itself. Christ within us is our hope of glory, because he thus discovers to us that we are in the way to glory. Besides, he clears the heart he inhabits of all things which tend to depress and cloud its hopes; keeping off or beating back our spiritual enemies; subduing our corruptions; removing the darkness or prejudice that hinders us from receiving the great mysteries of his gospel; drawing partially aside the veil that conceals heavenly things from us, enabling the soul to realize and almost at times to discern and grasp them. There is no saying what Christ in the heart can do in the heart. He is the glory of heaven, and had the apostle called him glory in us, instead of the hope of it, he would not have said too much. There are some of you who would have answered again, "This also is true. Wherever my blessed Saviour comes, he makes a heaven. What must it be to be with him where he is, and behold his glory!" O what a happy man is the Christian! at least, how happy might he be! With such a prospect before him, and such a hope within him—a hope resting on so glorious a foundation, Christ the Rock of ages; and proved to be a good hope by so glorious a test, Christ dwelling in his soul—if this cannot make a man happy, what can?

The best use you can make of all you have now heard, is to ask yourselves, and to ask it seriously, on what your hope of glory is built. Most of you hope for heaven when you die, but it is mournful to think how many there are among you, who have no reason to give why you hope for it; or if you have a reason, how different it is from that which we find here! You talk of your kind hearts and blameless and useful lives; but what says this text and the whole Bible? "Christ the hope of glory." Every thing short of Christ is a refuge of lies. It will deceive the soul for a time with the prospect of safety, but when the great storm comes, it will shiver to pieces, and leave the soul without a shelter or home. And then again the hope that others

of you speak of, that rests on what you call the merciful nature of Jehovah—a hope which leads you to say, in opposition alike to all scripture and all experience, “God is too good to punish and destroy”—why, brethren, it is a hope which some of the very worst of men cherish; men of whom you yourselves would say, there can be no hope for them. Christ in the soul needful for it? It will live in the soul from which Christ is the farthest away, amid sins without number and pollutions the most vile. It is another delusion. It is worse; it is a daring presumption, and it will end in destruction. O for that hope which begins with Christ and ends with Christ; which looks to his cross and throne for heaven, and looks to his work in the soul for the evidence of its own soundness and reality! Such a hope comes from God and leads to God. It is a hope of which we shall never be ashamed, world without end.

SERMON XXXI.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE BLIND LED.

ISAIAH XLII. 16.—“I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

THE ways of the Lord are from everlasting. Ages before his people existed, all his plans concerning them were determined on. It was settled once for all in his unchangeable mind, both what he would do for them and how he would do it. With the future thus arranged before him, it is no wonder that we find him frequently speaking to us in his word of his purposes in it. They are glorious purposes ever present to his mind, occupying and delighting it, and they seem to come as naturally from him

in holy scripture, as any delightful plans of our own would come from us in our converse one with another.

In this chapter, he tells us of his determination to bring the Gentiles to the knowledge of himself, and, in this verse, he seems to refer to their new and wondering feelings while he is doing this. He describes himself as leading them along a dark, unknown, perplexing road into light and brightness. But we may at once put these Gentiles aside, or rather we may regard ourselves as included among them. Here is a description of the dealings of the eternal God with every one whom he is leading to his kingdom. Are we journeying to a distant heaven, brethren, or wishing to journey there? Then here is an account of our road, and of what we must look for in it as we pass along.

Taking the words as they stand, we may notice in them,

I. *Our glorious Leader.* "I will bring them," the Lord says, "I will lead them." In other places he tells us he has prepared a kingdom for us; here he tells us he will conduct us to it. But he does not accomplish this in his own person. In the beginning of this chapter, he introduces his dear Son to us as his servant, chosen by him to bring to pass all his merciful designs concerning us. That dear Son therefore is become to us, in his Father's stead, a Leader and Guide. "Behold, I have given him," the Lord says elsewhere, "for a witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people;" and St. Paul, when speaking of God as bringing his many sons unto glory, places immediately the Lord Jesus at their head in their way to glory, calling him "the Captain of their salvation," at once their Saviour, their Ruler, and their Guide. Here is another proof then that Christ's appointed work was not ended when he had offered himself for our sins. That was the beginning, rather than the end, of it. We are captives in a foreign land; Christ was not only to pay our ransom for us, but to take us home when he had ransomed us. We are prisoners sitting, the seventh verse says, in darkness in the prison-house; he is not only to come and throw open our prison-doors, bring us into the cheerful light, and set us free; he is to take us by the hand when we are free, and to guide us by the right way to a city prepared for us. And it is a pleasant thought, brethren, that he who redeemed us, keeps us; that he who died for us, lives for us; that he who

rescues us from the misery of our fall, never leaves us till our whole salvation is completed; never lets one of us go, till with his own right hand he has placed us out of the reach of all misery and all danger, in his own safe world of light and joy.

II. We may look next at *those whom the Lord is leading*.

"I will bring the blind," he says; and this is the only description he here gives us of them. He means, you may think, those who were once blind, and whose eyes, according to the seventh verse, he has now opened. But perhaps he means that they are blind still, blind even while he is leading them, ignorant and blind even when brought by Christ's hand into the way to his kingdom.

Our own feelings correspond with this. If we look backward at what we were, we bless God that whereas we were once blind, now we see. We bless him for having opened our understandings, and taught us many things of which we were formerly as ignorant as the very stones. But when we turn away from the past, and look at ourselves only as we now are, "What have we learnt?" we say; "what do we know?" We often feel that we know nothing; and worse than this, that we are almost incapable of being taught any thing; senseless as well as ignorant; like scholars who have much to learn, and yet so impenetrably dull that they can learn nothing. Those whom the Lord is leading, are in their own esteem blind. They are men who have discovered that they cannot guide themselves; that "the way of man is not in himself," and never will be in himself; that place him where you will on the road to heaven, he is as incapable of finding his way along it as he was of entering it at first. He is a blind man still, and leave him to himself, after all his experience, he will strike into some wandering path, and never set foot in his Father's kingdom.

III. We have a description of *the road along which the Lord is leading us*. He speaks of it both as new to us, and also as dark or mysterious.

It is *new* to us; "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known"—paths which they have never trodden in before, and with which they are altogether unacquainted. And this, you perceive, adds to their difficulties. A blind man may do very well, may get on,

in a road he knows, but these blind men are in a road which is perfectly strange to them.

And here again, brethren, our feelings are met. They who are really setting out for heaven, are often spoken of in scripture as new creatures, and they soon discover that they are such. A great change has taken place within them, in their judgments, tastes, inclinations, feelings. But besides this, they seem to themselves to have entered a new world. They are becoming acquainted with things, the very existence of which was before unknown to them, and are passing through much, of which till now they had no conception. Real sorrow for sin and real humiliation before God on account of it; a real dread of his wrath and a real desire of his favour; the difficulty, the conflict the soul knows before it can wholly cast itself on its Saviour, and when it has done this, the propensity within it to cleave again to itself and detach itself from that Saviour; a longing to do his will and live to his glory, and yet a feeling within that it cannot do his will, that it might as well attempt to lift up a mountain from the earth as live to his glory—to all these the traveller to Zion was once an entire stranger; he is now one by one becoming acquainted with them all. He feels, I may say again, a new creature in a new world. “Old things are passed away. Behold, all things are become new.”

And it does not much alter the case if he has heard a good deal of these things before he experiences them. “The hearing of the ear” is a totally different thing from the experience of the heart. The theory of the Christian life is very much like the science of optics. A blind man may learn that science; nay, teach it and teach it well; but give such a man his sight, the world he beholds around him, is a new world to him. And so is real, practical Christianity new to every man who for the first time feels its power. “I had heard of all this,” he says, “I thought I knew it, but I did but dream. I was as ignorant of it as that blind philosopher is of daylight.”

And the road in which the Lord is leading us, is *dark* also and *mysterious*.

Every road that is new to us, is not of necessity this. Though we have never travelled it, it may be much such a road as we had anticipated, and may clearly be going in the direction whither it professes to take us. But the way spoken of in the text, has darkness, it is intimated, hanging over it: and it is a circuitous,

winding way; it seems at times to be leading us from heaven rather than to it. This heightens still further the picture. There is not only our own ignorance, our own blindness, to make our Christian course trying to us, it is rendered still more trying to us by its own character. Could we see with the greatest clearness, we should still find ourselves often involved in obscurity and mystery.

And it is a great point gained at the commencement of the Christian life, to anticipate this. Scripture leads us to do so. It speaks of God as a God who hides himself, purposely hides himself, and this in the character of our Redeemer. "Verily," the prophet says, like one who had himself experienced the truth of it, "verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." Referring to the passing of Israel over the desert, "Thou leddest thy people like a flock," says the psalmist; but what has he said immediately before? "Thy way," thy way even while leading them, "is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known."

And such of you, brethren, as are really journeying heavenward, have found this also to be true. You meet in your way not only with much that is new to you, but with much that is perplexing.

There are the doctrines of the gospel—you would understand and you would believe them all, but great, you say, is the mystery of some of them. They seem past your comprehension; and if not so, past your belief.

And then there is the providence of God, his dealings with you—much here again is darkness. You know not at times how he is dealing with you, nor what he is doing. Things turn out so differently from your expectations, that you are for a season perfectly bewildered, and scarcely know where you are nor whither you are going, whether in fact you are in God's ways or far from them, the sheep of his hand under his guidance, or the lost, wandering sheep of the mountains.

I might speak too of the outward afflictions you meet with. These often wear a very perplexing and mysterious aspect. You looked for afflictions, but you looked for them under certain circumstances and of a certain character, and to accomplish this or that particular end; but these are come upon you under circumstances entirely different, and are of a most unlooked for character, and do not appear likely to answer any one good purpose or end. The reason for which they are sent, the

course they are to take, how you are to find strength to bear them, in what way you are at last to be relieved from them—you enquire and enquire again into these matters, but an impenetrable darkness hangs over them; you can get no answer to your enquiries, and find at last it is useless to seek one.

And turn to your inward feelings. It is much the same there, or rather you find more to perplex you there than any where. You seldom feel as you thought you should, or as you imagine it would be well for you to feel. You are sometimes peaceful and very peaceful when you expected to be disquieted; and then again your soul is almost in a tumult, when you looked for an unbroken calm. And your feelings undergo so many changes, changes for which you cannot account, nor trace to any cause, nor connect with any holy end; on the contrary, many of them seem opposed equally to your holiness and your happiness, to your usefulness in the world as much as to your own comfort in it. You have, for instance, a season of spiritual consolation and peace. "This is to enable me," you say, "to serve my blessed Saviour at last with a warm and happy heart. He has sent it me to strengthen me for his service." But all at once a cloud comes over you; a something comes, that chills and blights your happiness, disabling you, as you think, for Christ's service, and plainly telling you, as you imagine, to lie still. But, enfeebled and disabled as you deem yourself, "You must rise and serve me," Christ says; "serve me with that cloud upon your soul. You must do more for me, with that aching, sorrowful heart within you, than I ever gave you to do when your heart rejoiced."

There is mystery every where, brethren, in our way to heaven; mystery within us, mystery around us, many mysteries behind us not yet cleared up, and still many before us to be entered and passed through. It would be easy to shew that much of this is unavoidable, arising from the character of real religion and our own character; and it would be as easy to shew that it all tends to the divine glory and our good. The Lord brings us acquainted by it with his own glorious perfections, exercises by it the graces he has given us, humbles us, strengthens our faith, teaches us to confide, repose, and delight, in him. He works in us by it a meetness for heaven while leading us to it, making the very road which conducts us to his presence, fit us for its joys. All this however we must pass by. The chief

object of the text is to bring us to expect strange and dark things in our heavenly way ; to check us when we are anticipating a straight and bright road, and to prepare us for a perplexing one. "You are blind men," the Lord says, and that would seem to be enough for his purpose, but he does not deem it enough ; "I am leading you," he says again, "along a new way, a way you know not ; along strange paths, and these often dark as darkness itself, and winding and crooked." "We are prepared for hardship," you say, "and for difficulty in the way to God ; a rough road, a toilsome, climbing, and long one." This text calls on you, brethren, to be prepared for a very bewildering one. It perplexed even Paul with his wonderful knowledge of divine things ; it has perplexed every one who has ever trodden in it. Before it has carried you to heaven, it will perplex you. The Lord make you willing to be perplexed in it ! The Lord enable you to see in your perplexities something like a proof that you are in the way to him ! a proof that he remembers this faithful promise of his, and is now fulfilling it according to his everlasting purpose in you !"

IV. We may now go on to another point in the text—the *occasional light and relief which the Lord promises to his people in their way* ; "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

"I will do this," he says. It is useless then for us to attempt to do it. Nor must we look to our fellow-men to do it for us. Our help in this case, as in every other, cometh from the Lord. We must look upwards for the Lord's hand ; wait his time ; he will do it.

Our darkness, he says, shall be turned into light, crooked things shall be made straight. By this we are to understand that our perplexities shall at times be cleared up, and the seeming impediments in our way to heaven removed, or if not removed, be seen to be no impediments at all. We shall discover that the Lord is really conducting us to heaven, and that by the right, and sure, and best way to it. Think of a traveller bewildered at night on his way to his home. He thought he knew the road to it, but the darkness is so thick, that he cannot tell whether or not he is in it. He has been winding hither and thither in the devious track he has followed, till he begins to fear that he has got out of the right path, and is pursuing a wrong one which will lead him he knows not whither. But the moon

risers or the morning breaks; he starts with a joyful surprise to see his own longed for home directly before him, and the very road he is travelling the road that will lead to it. Many such surprisals as this does the Christian traveller meet with. You yourselves, brethren, may expect to meet with them. The promise says so, our Lord's own promise; "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." "Unto you," he says again, "it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God." "It is your appointed privilege to be initiated into the mysteries of my gospel and kingdom, my grace and providence; not thoroughly to understand them, but to know something of them, to know more and more of them, to know enough of them not to stumble at them in your way, not to be turned back or long discouraged by them. You shall have light enough in your way to make your way a practicable and frequently a plain and bright one."

And this light is often thrown across our path in very unexpected seasons. "At evening time," the prophet says, "it shall be light;" at evening time, when appearances and experience would say, no light can come. And so we find it. Dark afflictions are often rolled away in a moment, while we are saying, no relief shall we ever have from them: or if not rolled away, light breaks in upon them; we see their end and design; the Lord discovers to us why he has sent them. The same with divine truths and doctrines. We cannot understand them, they appear so mysterious; or we cannot bring our minds to receive them, they appear so hard, so opposed to our reason or else to some parts of God's faithful word: but we hear a sermon, or we read a book, or some passage of scripture is brought with power to our minds, and the mysterious doctrine, the hard saying, is understood and received at once. We see its meaning, we discern its truth. Instead of stumbling at it as we used to do, wishing it out of our way, we rejoice in it. The crooked thing is become straight, the dark thing is become light. Think of our Lord's disciples. Amidst how much darkness did they begin their course! how perplexed they were when he talked to them of the mysteries of his kingdom! When he spoke to them for instance of his approaching sufferings or the spiritual nature of his kingdom, they could hardly understand the plainest things he said. If ever men were spiritually blind, they were the men; and worse than blind—much that our Lord said,

offended them. And for three long years he suffered this to go on. But at last the darkness became light. In one week or little more after their Master had left them, these men were glorying in the truths at which they had before wondered. Every thing had become plain to them. They were travelling along the way to heaven with light above and light within them, the rejoicing preachers of their Master's cross, that very cross of which for years they could scarcely bear to hear him speak. Here surely is comfort for you, brethren, who are mourning over your ignorance ; and here is comfort for you who are battling with your prejudices. Ignorance and prejudice are nothing to the Lord. A few beams of his light let in upon them, end them at once. And this light, the scripture says, you shall have. O seek it, hope for and expect it. It may be twilight with you now, or even midnight ; but tarry thou the Lord's leisure, the promise says—it shall eventually be day and a bright one. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

V. We must just notice the concluding promise in the text. It is *a promise of permanency and unchangeableness in Jehovah's love to the people he is guiding*; "These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

The Lord speaks here like one who has fully made up his mind to do what he promises, knows he can do it, and is determined he will. His greatness first appears in it. In the preceding verse he has spoken like a great God. No obstacles, he says there, shall stop him from executing his purposes concerning his people. Mountains and hills, rivers and pools, shall vanish before him when they come in his way as he is leading them. They shall keep on their way in spite of them. He will make waste, scatter the mountains, and dry up the pools. Here he seems to be expressing again the same idea, but adding to it now another, declaring the unchangeable character of his love for his people, at the same time with his greatness. "These things will I do unto them"—no one shall hinder me ; "and I will not forsake them"—nothing in them shall make me weary of leading them. He seems to foresee the trials of his patience, that he shall have from us as he guides us along, our provocations ; but, "I do not regard them," he says. "In spite even of them, I will lead my people on. I will not leave them in

any case. In no emergency, under no provocations, will I forsake them." In another passage of scripture, he speaks of his Son as guiding his people in the character of his angel to a promised heaven, and tells them there that they must not provoke him, for "he will not pardon their transgressions." He says nothing contrary to this here, only he says that though he is a holy Saviour, he is a faithful, unchangeable one; that though he will smite and scourge and, if need be, scourge again the people that follow him, he will not give them up, not abandon them. They have put themselves under his guidance, they have committed themselves to his keeping, and he will never let them go out of his keeping, he will guide them by his counsel, and after that receive them to his glory.

May we not then say, "Happy are the people that are in such a case!" Happy are those whom the eternal Jehovah is leading along even a dark road to heaven! This is the feeling, brethren, this text should call forth in every heart, even in yours who are in heaviness and darkness in God's ways. "You are happy men," it says, "notwithstanding your darkness. You are just where the eternal God purposed ages ago, and promised ages ago, to place the people he loves; exactly in those circumstances into which he said he would bring his redeemed and chosen." "We are perplexed, bewildered, and distressed," you say, and so he tells you in this text you should be, and be again and again before your earthly pilgrimage is done; but what does he tell you here beside? That he is leading you along all the while he is perplexing you. Wondering and distressed, through his grace you are going on. The darkness is thick, but you are getting through it. The road is a crooked one, but it will end in straightness. Now nothing may be as you would have it; wait a little—every thing perhaps shall be even in this world almost as you would have it; the clouds dispersed, the way plain, heaven in your eye, and something like the peace and joy of heaven springing up in your hearts. O brethren, who would ever make light of the grace of Jesus Christ, that knows its value? I mean, even its present value; its power to steady, strengthen, and tranquillize the soul in this world of storms. It "bringeth salvation;" it saves the immortal soul—that is the highest thing which can be said of it; all else which can be said of it, is poor in comparison with that; but if we lose sight of

that for a moment, if we think only of the wonderful peace this grace can give to man's harassed soul in these days of his darkness, "Lord," we should all say, "give us of this grace, though thou take from us every thing besides, which thou hast given."

SERMON XXXII.

THE SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY.

CHRIST SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

PSALM cx. 1, 2, 3.—"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness; from the womb of the morning, thou hast the dew of thy youth."

THIS psalm may be said to be honoured in the new testament above all others. It is quoted there no fewer than six times. And every time it is quoted, it is referred to Christ. And there is this peculiarity to be noticed in it—while most other psalms are applicable to our Lord in a secondary sense only, speaking first of David or Solomon and then through them of him, this speaks of him primarily, or rather of him only. No other is allowed any place whatever in it. It is like a stately temple sacred to him alone.

In the portion of it now before us, the Holy Spirit foretells,

I. *His heavenly exaltation*; "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand."

"The Lord"—in the original it is "Jehovah," the eternal God, as the capital letters in our translation indicate.

"My Lord"—Christ, as Christ himself told the Jews; David's root as well as offspring; his son, but his Lord and God as well as son.

"The Lord *said* unto my Lord,"—the past tense, you observe,

instead of the future; a common mode of expression in prophecy, indicating God's fixed determination to do what he purposes. He has settled it in his mind to do it. "Write it down therefore," the Spirit says, "as already done."

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand." Here are two ideas, elevation and power.

First, *elevation*. We must imagine ourselves for a moment in heaven. You see there a countless multitude of happy beings, rising one above another, if not in happiness, in station and glory. As your eye glances delighted from the lowest to the highest of these happy beings, the distance between them seems great, even immense; but then above the highest, at a distance immeasurably more immense, sits the eternal Jehovah, the Lord of all. And now the risen Man Christ Jesus, his work on earth being done, comes to this heaven. Its everlasting doors open to receive him, and amid the shouts of transported millions he enters it; and what place shall he have in it? We look perhaps to the highest rank of the highest angels, and expect him to take for himself a place there, and the most exalted that can be found. But, "Sit thou at my right hand," says the lofty Jehovah to him. He calls him up far above all angels to himself. That immeasurable space, separating the highest creature from the Creator, which none before had ever passed through, he passes through, and sits down by the side of the everlasting God. God has not only exalted him, St. Paul tells us, but "highly exalted him." "He has set him," he says again, "at his own right hand in the heavenly places," not only above, but "far above principality and power, and every name that is named" in those heavenly places. In the highest world of all worlds, among the highest beings of all beings, he has the pre-eminence; he is lifted up above all. O may he ever be revered and adored above all by us! May he be lifted up far above all other beings in our hearts!

Power also is intimated in these words.

The text does not say so, but it is a throne, on which the ascended Jesus is here invited to sit. He who calls him up to him, is the great Sovereign of the universe; and his bidding him sit down by him at his right hand, is an investing of him with a share of all the authority and dominion he himself possesses; it is an enthronement of him with himself as the world's great King. Other scriptures declare this more plainly. "Him

hath God exalted," St. Peter tells the Jews, and for what purpose? "To be a Prince." "The government shall be upon his shoulder," says Isaiah. "The Lord hath made him head over all things," says Paul; "he hath put all things under his feet;" "he must reign." And he himself seems to have had this in his mind as he was going to his Father. "All power is given unto me," he said to his disciples just before his ascension, "all power in heaven and in earth." His ascending therefore to God's right hand, and his seating himself there, we must regard as nothing more than his going and placing himself where he ought to be; where he may exercise the power that is delegated to him, in the station and with the magnificence which become it. It is a king's going out from the common crowd of men, and placing himself on his throne, declaring himself a king.

And we must ever bear in mind, brethren, that it is in his human character our Lord is thus elevated and enthroned. In his divine nature he was elevated and enthroned before, incapable of exaltation, so high that he could not be higher. The marvellous fact we have before us here, is the exaltation of the Man Christ Jesus; the lifting up of one like ourselves from this low world to the summit of the universe; and not to be dashed down again, but to sit there, to abide there, reigning there Jehovah's Fellow or Compeer, or more plainly Jehovah's Representative, over the wide creation.

But turn again to the text.

II. It sets forth *the state of our world at the time when Christ was thus exalted to be its King.*

We might have supposed that the world would have welcomed with joy and thankfulness such a King. He is one of ourselves; he has shewn already that his heart is full of kindness and love towards us; and we are told by the God who has exalted him, that he has exalted him with the most merciful designs, that he may be a Saviour to us as well as a Prince, take from his riches in glory the most precious things those riches contain, and pour them down on us with a royal munificence. But what is the fact? The psalm describes the world as in a state of determined hostility to him. The first verse in it speaks of his enemies, and the great work it throughout speaks of as going on in our world, is the subjugation of his enemies. But this applies, you may say, to Jerusalem and the nation of the Jews.

Beloved brethren, it applies to ourselves and to all mankind. We are all by nature the enemies of Jesus Christ, as much alienated from him as we are from his Father. This blessed Jesus was not hated in Jerusalem only where he was crucified, as though there was something peculiar in the men of that place, as though some fatal necessity hung over them, which impelled them to crucify the Lord of glory—he was hated wherever he appeared; and had he gone out from Judæa and Galilee into other countries, he would have been hated there also; Rome, with all her boasted admiration of virtue, would have cried out for his destruction, and polished Greece would have cast him away with scorn. How were his followers treated when they went from country to country, preaching his gospel and proclaiming his kingdom? They found that they were going every where through a hostile world; they every where brought on themselves and on their Master the world's enmity. And what is the effect of the gospel now, when it is any where plainly, fully, and earnestly preached? We try to conceal the fact, but we cannot—it calls into action, it brings into sight, the dreadful hostility which is slumbering in men's breasts against Christ; it is sure to excite men's displeasure the very instant it begins to clothe itself with power, and touch men's consciences and hearts.

We could easily account for this. The explanation of it is to be found in our corrupt fallen nature. "The carnal mind," says the scripture, "is enmity against God," and because it is enmity against God, it is hostile to this holy Representative of God, to him who is God's image and likeness, and is appointed to rule over the world in God's stead. And it is there mainly, in his claims on us as our Ruler, that the secret cause of our enmity against Christ lies. He is a holy Ruler, and one who will be bowed down to and obeyed; we, self-willed, unholy men, do not like such a Ruler, nor any Ruler at all, who is to humble and control us. We dislike the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is the kingdom, the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, that men most hate. "Tell us," they say, "he is our Teacher, and we will listen to him; tell us he is our Saviour, and we will hope in him; nay, tell us he is our Lord, we will call him Lord, and join you in any outward act of respect and homage to him you please; but if you tell us that he is to interfere with our habits, our daily thoughts and feelings; that our liberty is to go; that

we are to be fettered every step we take in our business, pursuits, and even pleasures, by his laws—we tell you and tell you plainly, we will not bear this ; we will not have this man to reign over us.” This is daring, fearful language, brethren, but it is the natural language of every unregenerate human heart. It either is or has been our own.

Now with Christ on his throne and the world in this state of determined hostility to him, it is clear that something must be done, or one great end of Christ’s exaltation will be defeated ; he will not be a real, he will be only a nominal King. See next in the psalm therefore,

III. *The means employed by Jehovah to overcome the hostility of the world against his Son ;* “The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion.”

“The rod of thy strength”—this is a metaphor harmonizing with the language of the verse preceding. The Lord Jesus is represented there as a king and an enthroned king. Now kings when on their thrones, frequently bear in their right hands a rod or sceptre, as typical of their authority. It may well therefore be called “the rod of their strength ;” it is an emblem of that authority which constitutes their strength ; and it is easy to carry on the figure in our minds a little farther, and regard it as the instrument or weapon by which they accomplish their sovereign will. The question is then, what in this case does this strong rod represent ? In other words, what are the powerful means which the great God employs in order to subdue a hostile world to Christ, its King ? We can answer the question in a moment—it is the gospel of Christ, the word of Christ. This is called in scripture a “powerful” word ; it is said to be “mighty through God.” The same name is applied to it, that is applied to Christ himself—“the power of God.” It is the sword which this most mighty Prince is called on to “gird upon his thigh,” and armed with which he is to “ride on in his majesty prosperously,” his right hand accomplishing “terrible things,” “his enemies and the people falling under him.”

This rod is to be “sent forth out of Zion”—the meaning is, the gospel which is to subdue the world to Christ, shall go forth into the world first from Jerusalem where the hill of Zion stood. Other prophecies foretel this. “Out of Zion,” says Isaiah, “shall go forth the law,” the new law of grace which is to con-

vert the Gentiles, "and the word of the Lord," he adds, "from Jerusalem." "It shall be in that day," says another prophet, "that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem." And the fact corresponded with these predictions. Our Lord, as though purposely to fulfil them, led his disciples back again from Galilee whither he had sent them after his resurrection, and one of his last commands to them was, that they should keep together at Jerusalem till the Spirit from on high should be poured out on them. And they were then not at once to disperse. They were to begin preaching his gospel at Jerusalem, thus making Jerusalem, as it were, the centre from which the light that was to diffuse itself eventually over the whole world, should stream forth. And who does not see his love to this guilty city in this? O honoured Jerusalem, we may say, loved and honoured to the very last! Stained with his blood, even on the point of being given up by him for its enormous transgressions, the love of its Lord still lingers over it. He cannot even yet forsake it, without giving it as he goes a parting token of his regard.

But what does fact say as to the power of this gospel? Has it proved itself the rod of Christ's strength? That something produced a mighty effect on the world soon after our Lord's ascension, is quite certain. "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies," says the text to him, and in the midst of his most violent enemies Christ did rule. In the inveterate and lately infuriated Jerusalem, thousands bowed at once to his sceptre, and throughout pagan Greece and Rome, his name was called on and adored. And what wrought this change? There were no Christian liturgies then, brethren; not one of the Christian fathers had yet written; pompous forms and ceremonies in the church were unknown; sacraments there were, but you could not get the Jew and heathen to attend them. All those things which some men in our day are holding up as the great means of evangelizing and saving the world, had most certainly nothing at all to do with this matter. What then had to do with it? What brought about this wondrous change? It was preaching, brethren, which brought it about; the simple preaching of Christ's gospel by a few determined, faithful men. It was going about this guilty world and telling men that the God they had sinned against, still loved them, and in the abundance of his love for them, had provided for them a Saviour. It was making known to men the Saviour God had provided for them,

the loving, suffering, bleeding, dying Jesus. It was holding up Christ on a cross to men, and bidding them look to him and be saved. This in God's hands, and this alone, caused the authority of Christ to be acknowledged in the earth. This gave him a people and a church and a kingdom in our world, when our world had determined he should have neither name nor place in it. "Thanks be unto God," says Paul, "which always causeth us to triumph in Christ;" and how were Paul's ceaseless triumphs won? "We preach Christ crucified," he says again; "to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness; but no matter who stumbles or who scoffs, the gospel we preach carries us triumphantly along. It is the rod of Christ's strength, and feeble as are our hands that wield it, wherever it comes, Christ is victorious. He is felt to be Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

IV. We see further in the text, what we have partly anticipated, *the happy results of this interposition of Jehovah*, the glorious success of the means which he employs for the establishment of his Son's kingdom. "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion;" then says David, foreseeing and exulting in what will follow, "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies;" and over whom is he to rule there? Over these enemies themselves, subjugating and crushing some of them, as the fifth verse shews; and turning others of them, as the text declares, into his willing subjects and friends. He is to have a people taken out from among his enemies, and a numerous people, and a people that shall do him honour; "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness; from the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth." Here is a description, and a beautiful one, of all Christ's real people in every age of the world.

They are, first, *a willing people*. "Willing," we may say, "for what?" Willing, brethren, for any thing and every thing which Christ desires. There was a time when they, like the rest of the world, were willing for nothing which he desired. They possessed by nature, in common with others, a principle of opposition and enmity to him. Every law he gave them, when inclination prompted, they trampled on; and every offer of mercy he sent them, they refused. They would not bow down to him as a King, they would not embrace him as a

Saviour. But he touched them with the rod of his strength, he made them feel the power of his Spirit and his gospel, and now there is nothing for which they are not willing. The language in the original is stronger than in our translation. It is "willingness," the noun for the adjective—a Hebrew way of expressing a thing forcibly. This people are more than willing, it implies; they are willingness itself; they are eager to receive Christ as their Prince and Saviour; they feel it to be their delight and joy to come under his dominion. Their own righteousness, the righteousness they clung to so long and thought so much of—does he command them to cast it off and to put on his? They are glad to cast it off, are glad to get rid of their dependence on it; and are never more glad, than when they can feel that the righteousness of Christ is covering and adorning them. Does he bid them renounce the world? A little while ago he might as well have bid them renounce existence; the world was their all: but their language now is, "Lord, sever me and the world asunder. I would give up a thousand such worlds for thee." Is his language to them, "Have done with sin?" "Lord," they say, "help us to have done with it." And then does he say to them, "Give me your hearts; yea, give me yourselves?" "Lord," they answer, "take our hearts and take ourselves. We can think of no higher happiness than to be entirely and for ever thine." "Willing"—it is exactly the word, brethren, that describes a real Christian. Does it describe you? Has there been a day in your history, which you have felt to be the day of Christ's power? a day when all your prejudices against him and his gospel have given way, all your reluctance to his service has been overcome? a day when you felt that you could stand out no longer against the constraining influence of his love, but would be and must be one of his? If so, let me tell you it is an unspeakable blessing to have the will subdued to Christ. His sovereign grace has led you over the line which separates his friends from his enemies, heaven from hell.

But again—this willing people are to be *numerous*. In the land where the scriptures were written, the dew is much more abundant than in our country, but even here the drops of dew as they sparkle on the trees and grass, are sometimes countless. As numerous, this psalm says, shall be the people of Christ. "From the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy

youth;" that is, "The souls that shall be born to thee through the gospel, shall equal in multitude the spangles of dew which the morning gives birth to, or reveals to our sight. And thou shalt not have to wait age after age for this, it shall take place in thy youth, soon after thou art exalted to thy heavenly throne." And so it was. It was a dreary night that the Saviour passed through before his ascension, but scarcely was he ten days old on the throne of his kingdom, when a day broke on the earth, which has ever since astonished it. "Go away from Jerusalem," we should have said to the disciples on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured on them; "your Lord has no people here; it is useless to preach his gospel in this guilty place." But preach it they did, and the first sermon they preached, bowed down three thousand souls before their Lord. They preached again; two thousand more yielded to their word, and for years afterwards wherever the gospel went, the effect was of the same character. And so it shall be again. This prophecy is only half fulfilled. May I say that another day of Pentecost shall come? Not so, but a day which shall resemble it; a day when the Spirit shall be poured out almost without measure on the earth, and Christ and his church shall have a second youth. "Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day?" says Isaiah: "or shall a nation be born at once?" And then he intimates to us that, through the mighty power of God, so it shall really be; that the turning of the world, both the Jewish and the Gentile world to Christ, shall be a rapid turning. It shall be like a birth, or like the glorious course of some wide-flowing, joyful stream.

And yet once again—the people of Christ are to be *beautiful*, and beautiful because holy. The text describes them as "willing in the beauties of holiness."

The drops of the early dew are beautiful. The rising sun not only discovers them, it brightens and gilds them, makes them the glittering ornaments in the early morning of our gardens and fields. And what were the early Christians? I am not speaking of those who in later centuries bore the name, but had no more of the likeness of Christ than we have now, nor perhaps so much. I refer to those who yielded first to the power of the gospel, and were the first fruits of the gospel unto Christ. Their very enemies were constrained to do them honour. They hated but they admired them. As they led

them forth to persecution and to death, they wondered at their lofty and splendid characters. But their graces were not their own. The dew does not sparkle when the sun does not shine on it. Even a Christian man has no beauty, no holiness, but as Christ imparts it to him. And what is his highest beauty and holiness? It is only a faint reflection of his Lord's beauty and holiness—a dew-drop reflecting the sun. But still that dew-drop does reflect the sun; and so does every real believer in Christ Jesus reflect in some measure his Redeemer's likeness. "Glorious in holiness"—that is the Lord's own character. Beautiful in holiness—that is the character of all who are made partakers of his grace and Spirit—their character now; "the beauty of the Lord" is already upon them; it will be more visibly, more brightly upon them in a brighter world.

Now comes the question—are we ourselves numbered among this willing, numerous, shining people? The Lord has set his own Son Jesus Christ on his lofty throne, and concerning every child of man the decree has gone forth, that they shall all be brought to his feet. "As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me;" and what does he say besides? "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." This decree concerns you and me, brethren; this psalm concerns you and me. St. Paul, referring to it, describes the Lord Jesus as seated on the right hand of God, "expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." We either are or have been his enemies, and there at his footstool he is expecting to see us. There one day or another we shall assuredly be. How shall we be there? as his willing subjects or his unwilling slaves? There are two ways in which this psalm may be fulfilled in us—we may lie down before Christ, or be beaten down. The difference between these two ways is far greater than we can imagine. It rests with us to make our choice between them. "I must in the end be at Christ's footstool—shall I be there willing or unwilling, happy or wretched, lost or saved? The answer depends on me. O thou blessed Jesus, have mercy on me! Bow me down now beneath the power of thy grace, that I may not be crushed beneath the power of thine arm in the day of thine appearing."

It may be that some of you have already offered up for yourselves a prayer like this, and that Christ is even now beginning

to answer it. He is gradually bending you down before him, carrying you through that discipline which will bring you to his feet, and in the end make you willingly lie there. Your sins are rising up against you. You carry about with you day after day disquieted and troubled minds. You try to look death and judgment calmly in the face, but you cannot. You would say were you to speak the truth, that you are stricken, fearful, and unhappy men. All this, dear brethren, may be nothing less than an answer to your own prayers. You may have said in some now forgotten hour, "Lord, make me thine;" and a blessed Saviour may have heard your cry, may have laid his hand on you, and may have been leading you ever since step by step to his feet. And what is it to be there? It is only to submit yourselves—to what? to his sceptre and rule? No; this will come after; this, I had almost said, is an easy thing after something else is done—it is to submit yourselves first to his grace, to believe that he has really done all that is needful for your salvation, and abandoning all thought of doing any thing yourselves, to cast yourselves entirely on him, through him to be freely pardoned, freely saved. Before he ascended that lofty throne, he made a perfect propitiation for your sins. It cost him more than your heart can think to make it; but he loves you so, that he would have let it cost more, had more been needed. With your salvation in his thoughts, he would never have come down from his cross could he not have said, "It is finished." He would never have sat down on the right hand of God, if he had not known that his work for you was perfect before he sat there. He was once your dying, he is now your ascended Lord. You may honour him at once in both these characters by accepting and taking at his hands, through a simple faith in him, his great salvation. "Thy people shall be willing"—the first proof we can give of our belonging to this willing people, is our willingness to come to this blessed Jesus as the only and all-sufficient Saviour of our guilty souls.

SERMON XXXIII.

WHIT-SUNDAY.

THE PROMISED COMFORTER.

ST. JOHN XIV. 16, 17.—I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you."

THIS is the testimony of God the Son concerning God the Holy Ghost—a high testimony concerning a high Being. May the Spirit himself raise up our minds to a right understanding of it!

I. It tells us that *the Holy Ghost is a person*; and I advert to this lest any of you should have taken up the strange, half sceptical notion, that the Spirit is nothing more than a divine attribute or influence. Let a man of common sense read this text, and he will say, I think, if he is an honest man, that the Comforter Christ speaks of in it, must be as really a person as Christ himself. It testifies of him not as a thing, but as a living Being. He is not called comfort in it, but a Comforter; he is not truth, but the Spirit of truth. And if this is not enough, turn only to the beginning of the sixteenth chapter of this gospel. There he is said to "come," to "reprove," to "hear," to "speak," to "receive"—all personal acts, and involving, if any act can do so, a real, personal existence.

II. *The Holy Spirit is a divine person*; he is really God. This, though not asserted in the text, is fairly to be deduced from it.

Our Lord's object is to comfort his disciples in an hour of peculiar sorrow—he is going away from them; and what he tells them with this object in view, is, that when he is gone, he will pray the Father to send some one else to them, "another

Comforter." It is plain then that he considers this new Comforter quite equal to himself, and feels sure that his disciples will find him so. Nay, he tells them in the sixteenth chapter, that they will gain by the exchange. "It is expedient for you," he says, "that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." Who then, we may ask, was Christ? He has just told his disciples that he is one with the Father. This Holy Spirit therefore, we infer, is one with the Father also; both he and the eternal Son constituting with the Father the everlasting Godhead; or rather they are that Godhead, manifested to us now in one way and now in another; now to be seen, embodied in human flesh, and now to be felt, working within our hearts.

But the Deity of the Holy Ghost does not rest on such reasoning as this only; it is revealed to us in scripture in the plainest manner. The same names are applied to him, that are applied to God; the same infinite perfections attributed, the same works ascribed, and the same worship enjoined. To be born of the Spirit, is to be born of God; to lie to the Holy Ghost, is to lie unto God; the mind of God, which is known only to God himself, this Spirit knows and knows perfectly. "He searcheth all things," says Paul, "yea, the deep things of God." Are these a creature's honours, brethren, or a creature's claims? No more than they are yours or mine.

III. Bearing in mind then that the Spirit is a person, not a thing, and a divine person, not a creature, we may pass on to another remark—*he is the Father's gift to the church through the intercession of the Son*; "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter."

It is difficult to speak on a point like this, without speaking amiss. There is a danger of our dividing the everlasting Godhead, and making one person in it inferior to the others. But an humble heart will guard us against this danger. You and I, brethren, are thinking now of a Being whom angels think of without comprehending. He is not only so vast, that our minds cannot take him in, but so high above us, of a nature and essence so exalted, that we cannot rise up to him, we cannot fully take in any part of him. If he speaks to us therefore of himself, he must accommodate his language to our capacities, and we must regard it as so accommodated. We shall thus be kept, on the one hand, from rashly ascribing to it a strictness of meaning it

was never intended to bear, and, on the other, from explaining it away altogether, and thus rejecting the truth it is designed to convey.

In a gracious condescension to us, it has pleased Jehovah frequently to speak of two Persons in the Godhead as subordinate to the other in accomplishing our salvation. While he represents the Father as the source of all authority and blessing, the Son he describes as the Father's Servant and Messenger, and the Holy Ghost as his instrument. He is said to send them both into the world, and to assign them their work in it. The Holy Ghost is said to proceed from him, and here he is represented as about to give him.

And there is this truth also to be remembered—all the blessings the eternal God conveys to sinners, he conveys through his exalted Son. He not only rules the world by him, but he blesses the world by him. It is his will therefore that the world shall look to the Lord Jesus as the channel of all his mercies. And what does he do? "I will not pour out my Spirit," he says, "on my church till my well beloved Son sits down at my right hand. Some drops of my grace shall fall secretly there, but the open and abundant shower I will withhold. The Holy Ghost shall go down to that guilty world as purchased for it by its Redeemer's blood, obtained for it by his intercession, sent thither by his authority, and commissioned to work there, in the hearts of his people, his sovereign will. All men shall honour my Son even as they honour me. My Holy Spirit shall go hither and thither at his bidding, and be restrained, or poured out in all the plenitude of his grace, at his command." Hence our Lord says in the next chapter, not that he will pray for the Comforter, but that he will send the Comforter to his church, and Peter on the day of Pentecost, when filled with the Spirit, ascribes the sending forth of the Spirit to him. "Being by the right hand of God exalted," he says, "and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." A most glorious truth! How it comforts the heart, brethren, to reflect that even the Godhead is placed, as it were, in the hands of our ascended Master. It is not our fellow-men and angels only, that he can move to do us service; God himself, the Father and the Spirit, are willing to do or give us any thing at his word.

And here again is the whole Godhead represented to us as at

work and combining for our benefit—the Son praying for the Spirit for us, the Father giving the Spirit to us, and the Spirit coming to us—all telling us that God is well pleased to bless us and comfort us, that he is blessing us with the full power of his nature. The Trinity in unity is no merely theoretical, abstract, cold truth; it is full of life, and power, and consolation to the soul, when the soul rightly receives it.

But turn again to the text.

IV. We learn from it further, that *the world rejects the Spirit, while the true disciples of Christ receive him.*

“The world cannot receive him,” our Lord says, and why not? O how the world needs him! It is lying in wickedness and perishing in ignorance, and he is the only Being in the universe, who can raise it out of its wickedness and enlighten its ignorance. But the world will have nothing to do with him. When he spake by the prophets, “Who,” they were forced to say, “hath believed our report?” When he spake by the apostles, the men of the world for the greater part cast his words behind them. And it is just the same now. The world does not and will not receive the Holy Ghost. Many of you will not receive him. You will stand up here and say you believe in him, you will listen to sermons concerning him; but as for opening your hearts to admit the Spirit there in all his humbling, mortifying, self-subduing and sin-subduing power, you never think of it. This forms no part of your Christianity. Your hearts are as close shut against the Holy Ghost, as though he were a tormentor instead of a Comforter, Satan instead of God.

And how is this? Our Lord partly explains it. He says the world will not receive him, “because it seeth him not neither knoweth him.” It cannot see him, for he is not visible to mortal eyes; and it does not know him, for he can never be known till he is received. Our acquaintance with him must begin within. It is an inward experience of his grace and power, that brings a man really acquainted with the Holy Ghost. It is thus, Christ says in the text, his people know him—“He dwelleth” in them: thence comes their knowledge of him. They once knew no more of him than the world knows, but he entered their hearts, and now, though they do not see him, they are become acquainted with him. Their knowledge of him is something like the knowledge which a blind man gets in the

sunshine of the sun that warms him, or like that which a man just recovered from a death-like swoon, has of the cordial that revives him. It is an experimental, heartfelt knowledge, and in the end a most pleasant and joyful one.

And, observe, this knowledge of the Holy Ghost is decisive of our spiritual character. I am not speaking to you about a trifle. Our Lord draws in the text a broad line between his disciples and all other men, and the distinction he makes between them is simply this—his disciples know the Holy Ghost, others do not know him; his disciples have received the Holy Ghost, others have not received him. Are you Christians indeed? Then the Holy Spirit is within your hearts, working and dwelling there. Are you ignorant of the Holy Ghost? unacquainted with his life-giving influence, and almost in doubt whether there be any Holy Ghost? Then read this scripture, and draw from it your own conclusion. Do not despise it. It is not a part of the sermon you are hearing. It is something the Lord Jesus Christ has said, he whom you profess to believe in and honour. It is something he came down from heaven to declare. It is one of the faithful and true sayings of the living God. O what a blessed sabbath might this be to some of you, if you would but pray, “Lord, make me to understand this text! O give me a heart really to believe it! If it condemns me, let me know it. There is still mercy with thee and I may find it. Better to be condemned now of my own conscience, than to be condemned hereafter of thee.”

V. We may go on now to another truth—*wherever the Holy Spirit is received, he is a Comforter.*

Twice in this chapter he is called by this name. The same name is applied to him in the next chapter and also in the succeeding one. And we may see in it the pity and love of Christ. His disciples were now much cast down, for he had just told them he was going to leave them. To console them, he promises to send them the Spirit to abide with them and supply his place; and in doing so, he speaks chiefly of that one act or operation of the Spirit, which he knew would meet their present feelings. He calls him the Comforter. It was comfort they needed, and a Comforter, he tells them, they shall have. We infer then from his words that one main part of the Spirit's work is to comfort the sorrowful.

Comfort implies sorrow. It pre-supposes trouble of some kind either felt or feared. The real followers of Christ know much of this, more than other men; and there is comfort provided for them more than for other men, and a special Comforter. The Father indeed comforts them. He is called "the God of all comfort" and "the God of consolation." The Lord Jesus comforts them. He is called "the Consolation of Israel." But this is not enough. It is made the peculiar province of the Holy Ghost, his special employment on earth, to watch over the comfort of the people of God. He is emphatically the Comforter. Friends comfort, ministers comfort, the scriptures comfort, providence comforts, the cross of Christ comforts, and the throne of Christ comforts; but not one of all these comforts without the Spirit, and none like the Spirit. And this these disciples of our Lord soon felt and understood. They were made happier by him when their Master was gone, than they had ever been in their Master's presence. They were happier in Jewish prisons and Gentile bonds, in the thick of afflictions, with Christ out of their sight, than they were with Christ by their side in security and quiet. He held back from them for a while the consolations he was well able to give them. It was his good pleasure to honour the Spirit; he therefore leaves it to the Spirit to impart these consolations to them.

And see in this text how well qualified the Spirit is to fulfil this blessed work. He is a divine Being, and he can give divine, effectual comfort. All the bliss of heaven is at his disposal, and he can take as much of it as he pleases, and give us as much as he pleases, and after we have received this, he can take more and more, and give us more and more as our sorrows rise. They must rise higher than the joy of heaven before they can exceed his power to comfort. And mark—he dwells and abides in us. Our neighbours can come to us in our trouble, and take words of comfort and kindly address them to us; but our neighbours are outside us, they speak to our outward senses only, and very often their comfort goes no farther; it does not penetrate. The Holy Spirit enters within, and takes heavenly consolations with him there. He speaks to the heart, and makes the heart listen to him, and warms as it listens, and bless him. He opens the heart and pours consolation into it; he enlarges the heart, that it may receive more and more consolation; he elevates the heart, that it may rise to the high happiness he is able to impart

to it. If he comforts, the heart is peaceful; if he comforts not, it knows no peace. And the real Christian soon learns this. Shew me a man who despises this Comforter or thinks little of him, I know at once that he is a stranger to all elevated Christian joy. Shew me a man who loves and adores him, there is a man who has either rejoiced greatly in the Lord or soon will do so. He has experienced the Spirit's power, and that has taught him the Spirit's excellence and glory.

But how does the Spirit comfort? The scripture before us will answer the question.

VI. We learn from it this one thing more—*wherever the Spirit comforts, he comforts by means of the truth.*

Two names, you observe, are applied to him here; he is "the Comforter" and he is also "the Spirit of truth." And this is not a merely accidental bringing together of these names, for they occur together again in the twenty-sixth verse of the next chapter, and yet again in the beginning of the chapter following. He is called "the Comforter" in the seventh verse, "the Spirit of truth" in the thirteenth. It is clear then that there is some connection between the comfort he imparts and the truth he communicates; in other words, he imparts comfort by communicating truth. He is an effectual Comforter, for he is an effectual Teacher. Instruction and consolation are indeed different things; they do not always go together; yet, in this case, they do go together, or soon follow one another. The understanding receives the truth by the power of the Holy Ghost, and then the heart feels, by the same power, the consoling virtue of it. You will accordingly find that throughout this lengthened discourse, the Lord Jesus speaks one moment of the Spirit as comforting, and the next of the Spirit as teaching. And our church speaks after the same manner in the collect for this day; "God, who didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort."

This truth, brethren, is one of much practical importance. You complain perhaps of your want of spiritual consolation. Let me ask, whence do you expect it to come? You will say, From the Holy Ghost. But I ask again, what kind of consolation do you expect from him? Joyful feelings springing up in

your minds you know not how or why, feelings for which you cannot account? such joy as the birds of the air feel as they sing, or the child feels as it springs and bounds? Then you will be disappointed, or worse—you will be deluded. The Spirit has no such joy to give. His consolations are based on God's word; they spring out of God's declarations and promises; they are the result of a right understanding and a heart-felt belief of God's glorious gospel. They are as rational as they are sweet. The man who enjoys them, can account for them. A happy Christian is no enthusiast; he is one of the most reasonable men in the world. Ask him why he is happy, and he will open his Bible and point to some truth there enough to make any man happy. The Holy Spirit has carried it home to his heart; and were it carried home in the same way to your heart or ten thousand hearts, it would make them all happy, and must make them so; for what is God's truth as revealed to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ? It is glad tidings; the gospel of peace, of hope, consolation, and joy. It proclaims through Christ pardon to the condemned, salvation to the lost, life for the dead. Here is hope, it says, for the despairing, help for the helpless, joy for the joyless, heaven for them that are nigh unto hell. Besides, the truth sanctifies, and holiness is happiness.

It is quite true, brethren, that a man is sometimes made thoroughly wretched at first by this gospel. The Spirit disquiets before he comforts. But this is not the gospel's fault nor the Comforter's. Men are living in error, comforting themselves with delusions, and the truth undeceives them. They are propping themselves up with lies, and the truth knocks their props away. The application of the remedy makes men feel their disease, and when sin is that disease, no wonder they are miserable. Ask me what the Spirit would do now with some of you, were he to begin to comfort you; I would say, he would send you from this church with some impression from this sermon more painful than you ever received from sermon yet, and an impression which you could neither laugh away, nor think away, nor get into the world and wear away. The truth would make you miserable, for it would take away all your false happiness; and angels would rejoice to see you miserable, and God himself would rejoice. They would well know where such misery would end. The Spirit would soon bring you acquainted with the great cure for all misery, the gospel of Jesus Christ—blood

that cleanses from all sin, a righteousness that hides all infirmities, grace so free that all may have it, grace so abundant that nothing is wanting in it, grace so lasting that eternity never ends it.

SERMON XXXIV.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

CHRIST THE LIGHT OF HEAVEN.

REVELATION XXI. 23.—“The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

THIS city, strictly speaking, has no real existence. It is of a symbolical or typical character. And there is a difference of opinion as to what it prefigures. Some refer it to the church in her millennial glory; others apply it to heaven. The probability is, that it represents both. Just as our Lord speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world as one event, because he saw between these two events a close resemblance, so here, and perhaps for the same reason, one symbol is made to answer to the millennium and heaven. The one will resemble the other. One picture therefore, the Holy Spirit says, shall serve for both; one vision of splendour shall predict both. He accordingly places before us, in this chapter, a glorious and happy city, and bids us see in it what in future ages the church shall be, partially in this world, completely in another. Let us try to look at it to-day in its highest character. Indeed the words before us require us to do so. They speak of heaven and, in their full sense, of heaven only. May God grant that they may raise our thoughts to that blessed world, open to us some of its glories, and make us long to be in it!

They give us three particulars to consider—first, what the

Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven ; secondly, what he is to heaven ; and, thirdly, the blessedness of heaven in consequence of what he is in it and to it.

I. The text tells us *what Christ is in heaven.*

He is the Son of Man, it says ; for it calls him "the Lamb," the same name that was applied to him in his human nature on earth, and a name which will not admit of being applied to him as the everlasting God. It involves in it an idea, not at variance with divinity, but yet quite foreign to it. It intimates something visible and tangible, something that the creature's eye can rest on, and the creature's understanding grasp ; something allied to the creature's nature, brought within his ideas and range ; not the invisible, incomprehensible Jehovah, but the real, substantial, approachable Son of Man.

And then further, this name sets him forth as retaining in heaven the marks of his sufferings on earth. He is there, it says, as the once crucified Son of Man, for why otherwise is he called "the Lamb?" Why was he called by this name on earth? Doubtless because he was to be an offering and a sacrifice to God. And why in heaven, but because he is recognized in heaven as one who has been a sacrifice? Turn to the fifth chapter of this book. "I beheld," says St. John, "and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain." And this circumstance, observe, is not lost on the worshippers around. "Thou wast slain," they cry, angels and saints. Twice in the song that follows, they speak of him as slain, and seem to ground on this fact much of their adoration and praise.

And this teaches us, Christian brethren, not only the blessed truth that we shall see in heaven the Saviour who bled for us, but that we shall see him as the Saviour who bled for us ; we shall never look on him without beholding in him that which will remind us of his dying love. It tells us that not only shall we live in heaven in a peculiar character, as redeemed sinners ; but that he also will appear there in a peculiar character, and that a character harmonizing with ours, as the Lord who redeemed us ; as the sinner's Lord and the sinner's God ; as one who delights in the relation in which he stands towards us, and will not put it off even when we are redeemed and his work is done.

But again—our Lord is styled also in this text “the glory of God.” I say, our Lord is so styled, because it seems quite evident that the glory of God and the Lamb mean here one and the same object. The same effect or work is ascribed to both. “The glory of God,” it is said, “did lighten the city;” and then it is added immediately, “The Lamb is the light thereof.” And look to the preceding verse. The Lord God almighty and the Lamb are connected there in precisely the same way as here; “I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.” And then again in the beginning of the next chapter, one throne is twice spoken of as the throne of both, and a pronoun of the singular number is made to comprehend both; “The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face.” The apostle evidently speaks as though by God and the Lamb he meant the same Person; as though he could not separate them in his mind; as though, in fact, they had been presented to him in this vision but as one object, and were but one object. And we are to infer more from this, than that the ascended Jesus is acknowledged in heaven to be God and Lord; we are warranted to infer that no other God or Lord is seen or thought of in heaven; and more also—that Christ’s human nature is as complete a manifestation of the divine glory as even heaven itself can understand or bear.

We can hardly believe this truth, brethren. We conceive that Christ is a light only to this dark world; that it is with a reference to our excessive ignorance only and darkness, that he is spoken of in scripture as so bright a revelation of the unseen Jehovah. But take us out of this dark world; place us in a world of light and beauty, a world where suns are not needed and moons could not shine; lift us up to heaven and give us there heavenly minds and powers; we shall see in heaven no spectacle so glorious as the once crucified Son of Man. We shall not want to see any. God will shine forth in him with a radiance that will stretch every faculty of our souls to contemplate it, and with a majesty which we shall every moment feel to be divine. It is not our ignorance here, that invests the Lord Jesus Christ with so much glory here, just as a glimmering taper is a brilliant object in a dark room; it is our ignorance and our distance from him, that hide from us here so much of his glory.

We are men more than half blind looking up through vapours and clouds at the glorious sun.

II. And now we are brought to our second point—*what Christ is to heaven*. He is in it as the Son of Man, the once crucified Son of Man, the glory of God ; he is to it a light, and all the light it has ; “ The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

Now it has been said, and the saying has been often echoed and commended, that the utmost ideas we can obtain of heaven are mainly of a negative character ; that, in our present state, we must never hope to understand at all what heaven is, we can do no more than understand what it is not. But surely this is a very low and unscriptural view of this subject. Much evil too arises from it. It removes heaven so far from us, places such a gulf between us and it, that we never try to realize it, never get familiar with the idea of it, never feel at home in the contemplation of it, never become, in fact, heavenly-minded. The Bible speaks a different language. While it tells us plainly that we never can comprehend fully the blessedness of heaven, that our highest conceptions of it in our happiest moments fall immeasurably short of its loftiness, it yet aims, it almost labours, to give us some ideas of it. It talks of it, and describes it, and paints it, and employs figure after figure to set it forth ; and all to bring us to some conception of its nature, and to carry up our minds to it. True, it employs negatives, but it does not stop at negatives. Look at the next chapter. “ There shall be no night there,” it says of this city, no darkness, nothing of which darkness or night is an emblem—here is the negative character of heaven ; but the description goes on ; “ There shall be light there,” it says, and glorious light. “ Think,” it says first, “ of the inconveniences and miseries of darkness—you shall experience nothing like them in heaven. And now think of the comforts, and joys, and advantages, of light and day—in heaven you shall experience them all.”

There are two ideas generally connected with the word “ light ” in scripture, when used in a spiritual sense—one primary idea, knowledge, because light shews us things as they are ; and then a secondary idea, joy, because a right knowledge of spiritual things imparts joy. When therefore we are told that there is light in heaven, that God dwells in light there, that the inheri-

tance of the saints there is an inheritance in light, we are to understand that heaven is a world of knowledge, and such knowledge as gives rise to pleasure and joy; that we shall not lose our character as intellectual beings there; that our minds and understandings will go with us to heaven, and be called into exercise in heaven, and have every thing brought before them, that can expand, and elevate, and delight them. Here on earth the Christian is not a creature of mere feelings or sensations, of joys coming he knows not whence nor how; he is not a mystic or enthusiast; he is a sober-minded, rational man, more so in his religion perhaps than in any thing else. In heaven he will rise higher still in spiritual understanding. He will comprehend the happiness that fills him. It will all flow from knowledge imparted to him, from knowledge received by an active, vigorous understanding into a clear, holy, and enlarged mind.

But whence is this knowledge to come? The text tells us. It traces it, observe, to the glorified Jesus as its source. God in Christ, it says, and in Christ as the Son of Man, is the author of it.

"The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it." In this imperfect state of the church, we need the sun and the moon, all the help we can obtain. We want the assistance of created things to impart knowledge and joy to us—scriptures, and ministers, and sacraments, and ordinances. But not so in heaven. All these things will have passed away. Christ himself will teach us, teach us and bless us by himself, without any inferior helps, without any veil between him and us. He will hold out the blessing to us with his own hand, and with our own unworthy hands we shall take it from him. Why had the city no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it? It is because "the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." And this idea runs through this whole book, and indeed through all scripture. We are taught that as the beginnings of grace on earth are Christ's workmanship, so the perfections of grace in glory will be his workmanship also; that as he is all in all to us here, so he will be all in all to us there; that as even now, whatever channels may be employed to convey blessings to us, all "our fresh springs," our sources of blessedness, are in him, so hereafter our happiness when complete will lie in him; he will be the one great spring of our pleasure, our glory, and our joy; the fountain of our life and light. "In thy

light," says the psalmist, "shall we see light." "The Lord of hosts," says Isaiah, "shall be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people." "The Lamb," says this apostle, "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away," God himself shall wipe away with his own hand, "all tears from their eyes."

O what a view of heaven does language like this open to us ! If we love the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall not easily lose sight of it, we shall never forget it. I shall not only see my adored Redeemer in heaven, see him with these poor eyes that are not worthy to look up to the heaven in which he dwells, but I shall be taught by him, and cheered by him, and made happy by him. It will be no longer in my case meditation on him ; it will be sight, sense, feeling, converse. I shall no longer say, "O that I knew where I might find him !" he will be by my side. I shall not envy Mary there, or Martha, or Peter, or John ; I too shall sit at his feet ; I too shall sit down and eat with him ; I too shall lean on his bosom, and feel him to be mine, the strength, the joy, of my heart, and my portion for ever.

III. Let us now glance at *the greatness of this heavenly happiness*. This is evidently the point to which the text is intended to bring us. Its design is to shew us how much happier a world heaven is than earth, and how much happier the church in heaven is than the church on earth.

It supposes, you observe, the church to have some blessedness here. It has its sun and it has its moon, some sources of knowledge and joy, and these quite sufficient, not to meet its desires, but to answer the purposes of its present condition. But then it implies that these sink into nothing, when compared with the light which will shine on it, the knowledge and joy which will be imparted to it, in the heavenly city. Just as the Lord who made that sun, excels that sun itself, so, we are told, will the light which flows from him in heaven, exceed in glory any light that the sun can give here. Think of a glowworm's shining. The light afforded us now by prophets, or apostles, or ministers, or scriptures, this text says, is like it. We may not feel it to be so, but so it is. Now think of the brightness of the mid-day sun ; contrast it with that insect's glittering ; so much will our blessedness hereafter exceed our blessedness now. The one is

called blessedness because it is found among wretchedness ; it is the twinkling of a glowworm at midnight. The other is called blessedness because it is blessedness ; because any creature in any state would deem it blessedness ; because it is really, intrinsically, the creature's highest excellence and felicity. Two remarks will make this evident.

1. The light that flows immediately from Christ in glory, *is clearer and brighter than any other light can be*. There is more of it, and what there is of it is of a purer nature.

Knowledge comes to us here through means and instruments, with some alloy and in a scanty measure ; it will come to us in heaven from a revealed Saviour in rich abundance and without any alloy, without any mixture of ignorance or error. We shall be nearer our object, and consequently shall see it better and understand it more. "Now," says the apostle, "we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." Here we are like men looking over a sea at a city we can just distinguish. We are obliged to ascend heights, and call in the aid of instruments, and seize favourable moments, in order to get even a faint view of it ; and sometimes we cannot get that ; mists and clouds intervene between us and it, and hide it from our sight. Hereafter we shall walk the streets of that city ; we shall be within its walls of jasper and its gates of gold ; its crystal light will shine on our heads ; yea, our eyes shall see its King in his beauty ; we shall come within the rays of his countenance, and his glory shall overshadow us. And more than this—

2. The knowledge we shall have in heaven is not only more accurate than any we can attain here, *it is a knowledge more easily acquired*.

How difficult do we sometimes find it now to lay hold of divine truth ! What a process are we obliged to pass through in order to arrive at a clear comprehension of the simplest truths of the gospel ! O think, brethren, of the means God has been constrained to employ to get any knowledge of himself into your minds ! How many these means have been and how diversified ! What pains he has taken with you, and how much discipline, and effort, and conflict, and sorrow, you have endured ! And what after all have you learned ? Little more than this, that God is very patient and you very ignorant ; that you ought to have known much, and yet know little, or, as you sometimes think, nothing at all. Now in heaven a glance will

teach you. No more mystery and perplexity ; no more painful and often unsuccessful efforts to separate truth from error ; no more struggling with the workings of a vain imagination and a proud heart ; no more need of miserable sermons and labouring ministers to instruct us ; no more humbling providences, and cutting sorrows, and mournful falls, to teach us ; we shall learn as easily as we now breathe ; we shall take in heavenly knowledge with as little effort as we now take in the air or light. Knowledge will flow like a stream into our minds, and bring happiness with it, and this every moment, and this for ever, without mixture, without interruption, without end. "Thy sun shall no more go down," the prophet says, "neither shall thy moon withdraw itself ;" and why ? for "the Lord," the unchangeable God, "shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

And now, brethren, let us ask, what is all this to us, to you and me ? I have spoken to you of this city of God as though we were all on our way to it, and should all eventually behold it and live in it ; but have I been warranted in so doing ? Glance over the chapter. The city, we read again and again in it, is a "holy city." It is a prepared city, built and prepared for a special purpose. It is the tabernacle, the dwelling place, of a holy God. It has walls and it has gates, walls great and high, we are told ; walls that no one can scale or beat down ; and gates which a holy God has indeed set ever open, but through which no one can pass but at his bidding. Now what follows from all this ? That the whole mass of us shall soon be in this city ? that every man here of every character will one day see the glory of God that lightens it, and the Lamb that is the light thereof ? Nothing like it. This follows—the last verse of the chapter tells us so—"There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth." This follows, "Without holiness," not one of us, "no man shall see the Lord." Let him be who he may or what he may ; let him be a just man, a blameless man, a kind man ; let him be ever so great, or wise, or honoured, or beloved ; if he is not a holy man, it signifies nothing, he shall not enter into this city ; he shall "in no wise," says the Spirit, enter into it ; he shall not see the Lord.

Before then we take the comfort this scripture offers, do, beloved brethren, let us ask ourselves whether we are justified

in taking it. Are we a holy people? Has God made us holy? Do we really desire to be made holy? Are we labouring and praying for holiness? Do we think more of holiness than of money, or pleasure, or consequence, or any thing besides? Do we long for it more? Had we rather have it than any thing or every thing else? Is sin the greatest curse we know, our heaviest burden, our bitterest sorrow? If not, we may hear of heaven, we may talk of heaven, we may wish for what we call its happiness, nay, we may half understand the nature of its happiness, but still there stands the sentence written, "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth." The testimony of God is still the same, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It is a mere trifling with the subject to stop short of this view of it, and it is a most mournful trifling with our own souls. We may say that our title to heaven comes from Christ; that it is Christ's blood and Christ's righteousness, his blood applied to us by faith and his righteousness put on us by faith; and this is true, but this does not alter the case—a holy Spirit must make us holy, or we shall never see a holy God; we must be made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," before we can obtain admittance into that inheritance; we must be "children of the light," and walk as "children of the light," or we must never dare to hope that we shall rejoice in the light of heaven.

SERMON XXXV.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE FALL OF JERICO.

JOSHUA VI. 16.—“It came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city.”

THE Jewish history, we must remember, is more than the history of a nation; it is a record of Jehovah's dealings with his church. That nation formed his church, and its history accordingly takes the character of a picture, wherein all his redeemed people may see shadowed forth their own pilgrimage through a stormy world to heaven. It comes home to the heart and experience of every real Christian, representing to him continually the very situation in which he himself is placed, the dangers with which he is surrounded in it, the sins into which he is prone to fall, the enemies with whom he has to contend, the help he is warranted to expect in his conflicts with them, the means whereby he is to overcome them, and the complete victory which will finally end his struggles. The spiritual import of this history is not imaginary, it is real. It does not rest on man's fancy, but on God's word. Holy scripture speaks frequently of it as emblematical in its character, and fully warrants us in so regarding and applying it. We shall not therefore be doing any violence to the part of it now before us, if we proceed to make of it a spiritual use.

Our subject is the capture of Jericho, a town of Canaan, by the children of Israel; and in order to get from it the instruction it contains, we must look at,

I. The situation of the Israelites at this time.

The wilderness is now behind them. For forty years they have traversed it in toil and suffering, but at last God has par-

tially fulfilled his promise to them, and they are standing on this side Jordan within the borders of the long wished for Canaan. But though in Canaan, the land is not yet theirs. A powerful nation is in possession of it, from whom they have still to take it, if they would occupy it. And how are they to take it? They are without military resources of any kind. Never was there such an invading army. A spectator, as he looked on them, would have said, "Go back. Think not of conquering a land like this. Beseech your God to divide Jordan once again for you, and fly once more for your lives into the howling wilderness."

And have we not shadowed forth here the condition of many of God's servants in our world? your own spiritual condition perhaps, brethren, at this moment? As you look backward, you can see that much indeed has been done for you. You were in a worse bondage than "the iron furnace" of Egypt. The world held you in captivity; or if not the world, the lusts of your own hearts held you. Sin was your master, sin was your misery, and sin was likely to be your destruction. But it pleased God, in his own sovereign mercy, to deliver you. By his Holy Spirit working in your soul, he discovered to you the wretched condition you were in, and brought you to the Lord Jesus Christ for deliverance from it. The opening of the Red Sea for the escape of the Israelites did not seem to them more wonderful or joyful, than the way of escape opened for sinners through the blood of the cross, seemed to you. For a little while, O how happy were you! Like those liberated Israelites, you sang of goodness, and mercy, and redemption, and thought you should sing of them for ever. But now what is your situation? You are ready to say, "Almost as bad as it was at first. We thought we were saved for ever, but we see now that our salvation is but begun. Where is that triumph over sin we looked for, that freedom and elevation of soul, that abounding in all godliness? Where is the joy in Christ which we expected, that sense of his presence, that blessed communion with him, that burning love for him? Alas! we know little or nothing of these things. Not only is heaven itself far off, but all that is heavenly and spiritual: it is yet to be won. And how is it to be won? We know not. We have as many difficulties before us as we have escaped, or more; and we are helpless as children."

Is this your language? Then look again at this history, and notice,

II. *The town these Israelites have now to take.*

Take it they must. They cannot possess Canaan till they have gained the fortresses of it, and here is one of those fortresses, which above all others must be secured; for, observe, it is both a strong town and a frontier or border one.

It is *a strong place*. The history describes it as walled or fortified. It was probably one of those cities which the spies saw and were frightened at, when they were sent forward from the wilderness to view the land. "The cities are walled and very great" they said; "they are walled up to heaven." And we see in the first verse of the chapter, that the inhabitants are making good use of their fortifications. Jericho, it is said, "was straitly shut up;" that is, its gates were all closed; the inhabitants were determined that no danger should be incurred by negligence or treachery. "None went out," it is added, "and none came in." O what a picture, brethren, of the Jericho that is within your hearts! Men of the world look on their souls as what we may call an open country. They conceive that there is a free entrance into them at all times for all that is good and holy. Talk to them of the holiness of the gospel and the happiness of the gospel, they never feel that there is any thing within them, which shuts these things out of them. But what do some of you think? or rather what do you know? If you are taught of God, you will answer, "We know this—our whole soul is entrenched against Christ and his salvation. It is covered all over with fortresses which shut him out. Not only have we every spiritual grace and blessing yet to attain, we have much within us to bring down and cast out before we can attain them." "Here is my pride," says one; "And my covetousness," says another; "And my ignorance," says a third, "and my unbelief, and my sensuality, and my love of the world, and my care for the world, and my fear of the world. These are Satan's garrisons within me. By means of these he entrenches himself in my heart. And worse still—when I set myself in good earnest against them, they seem stronger than ever. These Jerichos are straitly shut up whenever I attack them." So was it in the holy Paul's case. "When I would do good," he says, "evil is present with me." "I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in

my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?"

This was a *frontier town* also, as well as a strong one. It was the first the Israelites approached after they had crossed the Jordan. God gave them, you observe, a most formidable difficulty to overcome the instant they set foot in Canaan.

And so is it in the spiritual life. Severe conflicts, we say, are for the aged Christian; heavy trials for the man who has first borne light ones: the Lord deals gently with those who are inexperienced in his ways. And this is quite true. But yet it frequently happens that the servant of God has some one great difficulty to get over in the very outset of his course. It is a difficulty within him perhaps—there is some long worshipped idol in his heart to be dethroned, or some master lust to be vanquished. Or it may be a difficulty without him—he has a sacrifice to make, or a danger to incur, or some very painful duty to perform. "There is your cross," says the Saviour to him almost as soon as he comes to him; "there it lies. Take it up and see whether you can bear it." And all this for wise reasons, all in love and mercy to that man's soul. He is to be a warrior, and the sooner he finds it out, the better. He is to fight his way to heaven, and the sooner he learns how to fight, the more able he will be to press on. It is the battle, that forms the soldier. The Christian never knows much of the things of God, never makes any solid attainments in grace and holiness, till he has been, as it were, in the field; till he can say, "I have had a fight and a hard one, but by God's help I have conquered. There is one strong hold cast down. O may my blessed Lord enable me to cast down all!"

III. Let us now go on to a third point in this history—the *means by which these Israelites took this strong city*.

Concerning these we may make two remarks.

1. *They were means which God had appointed.*

If you read the chapter, you will see that he gave the people the most particular instructions how to proceed. Nothing was left to their own prudence or choice. They were to do this and to do that, but nothing besides. They were not to shout or even to speak till God commanded them. The men were treated like so many children.

And so, Christian brethren, does the Lord treat you and me. There is a necessity for his treating us thus. At all times, but especially when he first brings us to himself, we are children, as ignorant of spiritual things as the new-born babe of earthly things. We no more know how to master Satan or our own evil hearts, than we know how to control the sea or direct the clouds. The Lord therefore gives us instruction in all things. He leaves nothing for our fancied wisdom to do. Our real wisdom is to be mindful of our ignorance; to cast all our conceit away, just as we cast all our self-righteousness away; to ask at all times but this one question, "Lord, what hast thou commanded? What wilt thou have me to do?" This was Solomon's frame of mind in his best days. "O Lord my God," he said, "I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in before thee;" and then he asked wisdom of his God, as the blessing he most needed. And it was with similar feelings that David cried out, "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight."

2. But observe again—these means, thus appointed by God for capturing this city, *seemed most unlikely to succeed*. There is the mighty Jericho to be taken, with its gates all fast, and its walls every where manned and guarded; and what does God say to Joshua? "Dig a trench round it, and blockade it, and so starve it to a surrender?" or, "Make the most powerful engines you can, and batter its walls; assault it?" Nothing of the kind. "Let it alone," says God. "I have given it into your hands; it shall assuredly be yours: but you must not touch it. Cast no bank against it, nor shoot an arrow there. All you have to do is, to assemble the people, and to go round the city once daily for six days; to carry the ark with you, and to cause seven of the priests to walk before the ark and to blow with their trumpets as they pass along; and then on the seventh day do the same seven times over, and shout, and Jericho shall be yours. The wall of the city shall fall down, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him."

How strange, we may say, was all this! We can see no connection whatever between these means and the end to be accomplished by them. How must the inhabitants of that besieged city have first wondered at and then ridiculed them! How must they have scoffed as they saw the silent hosts of Israel pacing day by day round their walls in order to capture

them! But all this was of the same character as most of God's proceedings in our world. He planted his gospel here by means as strange—a tent-maker and a few poor fishermen did the work. He saves his people in our world by means yet stranger—a malefactor's cross purchases salvation for them. And so too in the spiritual warfare. If we would have the strong holds of Satan pulled down in our hearts, we must expect God to give us many strange commands, and deal with us often in a very strange manner. We must expect the work to be done by what we may deem weak and perhaps contemptible means. We must be prepared, not only to go to God for instruction, but to be often startled by the instruction we receive from him. When we look to him for strength, he may answer us by making us feel our weakness; and when we are determined to be zealous and active and take our enemies by storm, he may say, "Your strength is to sit still. In returning and rest shall ye be saved." And why all this? To answer this question, consider,

IV. The probable reasons why God appointed these strange means to overthrow this city.

And here we must again recur to the situation of Israel at this time. They had many cities to take, and this was the first of them. They had only just begun their warfare. The Lord's intention consequently was, not only to deliver Jericho into their hands, but in doing so, to teach them how to conquer other places, and thus to gain possession of the whole land.

And in dealing with us, Christian brethren, he looks beyond the immediate victory or blessing we may have in view. He looks to other victories and other blessings. He sees in us the people whom he has chosen, the Israel he delights in, those whom his own dear Son has purchased with his precious blood, and whom he is eventually to have around him in the heavenly Canaan; and while doing this or that for us, subduing in us this sin or bringing forth in us that grace of his Spirit, he does it so as to lead us on towards heaven and make us meet for our glory in it. We are short-sighted; he sees far onward, yea, into eternity; and hence the strangeness of many of his ways. But turn to the history.

A simplicity of obedience was certainly one thing this event was intended to teach these Israelites.

The very strangeness of the means enjoined them must have

been a trial of their obedience. Could they have seen any connection between them and the end they were to answer, their compliance with them would have been nothing, the success of them would have taught them little; but when they had employed them and they had succeeded, "See," they must have said one to another, "what we have gained by obeying God. He told us to march round this city, and to carry the ark round it, and to blow the trumpets. We could see no reason in all this, but the Lord commanded it and we did it, and now the city is ours, and ours without loss or effort. O let us in future always obey our God. Obedience is clearly our path to victory."

It was in a similar way that God dealt with our first parents in Eden. The act they were forbidden to do, had nothing apparently wrong in it. It was in appearance a harmless, a trifling thing. But its insignificance made it the better adapted for the divine purpose. It brought man's obedience to a more simple and certain test. Man disobeyed, and we know the result. We see in that result, that God's commands, be they what they may, must not be trifled with. We are not to sit in judgment on them; we must obey them.

A simplicity of faith was also inculcated here.

God loves to be trusted, brethren, as well as obeyed. He delights in the confidence of his people. He is their Father with a father's feelings, and he longs to see in them the feelings of children towards him, a confiding spirit. Besides, faith in him is needful in every step of our Christian pilgrimage. We are to walk by faith, to stand by faith, to live by faith, from first to last to be saved by it.

And what could be better calculated to strengthen the faith of these Jewish warriors, than the capture of this city in this mysterious way? They had only one thing to trust in as they followed the ark round its battlements—it was the promise of Jehovah that the city should be theirs. But they did trust in this one thing, and they were not disappointed—the city was theirs. Its walls as they fell proclaimed the value God puts on faith, as well as the success with which he rewards obedience. Hence St. Paul says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." He sees in their ruins faith's power and triumph.

The people were taught too by this transaction *the importance of a patient waiting on God.*

God has his own time for the communication of his mercies. He consults our good, not only in the things he gives us, but in the day and hour in which he gives them. They are not always ready for us the moment we wish for them. We must generally wait for as well as seek them. Waiting is as needful a thing for the Christian to learn, as faith or obedience. He does not know this at first; therefore the Lord soon begins to teach it him. Canaan was to be kept for a long while from Israel, at least the full possession of it. They were to take it only by little and little. It pleased God therefore at their first entrance into it, to let them see what they had to expect and to prepare their minds for it. Six days the walls of Jericho stand fast. Though they carry the ark round them as the Lord has commanded, not a stone is loosened nor a fissure seen. It is not till the seventh day, and not till they have compassed the city seven times on the seventh day, that these walls come down. Here then is not only obedience rewarded and faith encouraged, here is patience honoured, here is perseverance crowned. The God of heaven speaks to us from above that prostrate city, and tells us that not through faith only, but through faith and patience, we must inherit the promises.

And one thing more Israel must surely have learnt here—to *give glory to God*.

How did he deliver them out of Egypt? In such a way as forced them to admire his greatness, while they rejoiced in their escape. The burden of their song even in the first hour of their deliverance, was, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously. Who is like unto thee, O Lord? who is like thee?" And they must have sung the same song now, if they sang at all. Vaunting as they might be, they could not say, "Our sword and the might of our arm hath gotten us this victory." The city was delivered into their hands by means which excluded all boasting on their part, and secured all the glory to God alone.

And how, brethren, are our spiritual victories won? We know the answer—generally in a way that humbles us, always in a way that glorifies God. He tries our faith, our obedience, and our patience perhaps, before he gives us the victory, but to what do we ascribe it when it is given? To these things, or to any thing in us? We feel that we could not do so even if we would. The hand of the Lord is so laid bare in it, made so

visible, that we are compelled to see it, and as we see, to adore and praise it. "Not unto us," we say, "not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name be the praise."

And now let me speak in conclusion to three classes of persons among us. And, first, to those who are in a situation like that of these Israelites while besieging Jericho—such as are warring with some powerful evil which keeps them from the enjoyment of some spiritual good.

You say perhaps that the strong holds of sin within you can never be destroyed; that your hearts will sooner break to pieces, than have their pride, or love of the world, or some other evil in them, crushed. You have done all you can, you say, but there stands the vile garrison still, with its walls unshaken, defying your efforts and terrifying your souls. And there, brethren, it will stand till God has effectually taught you some lesson you have yet to learn. He is aiming at more than you are aiming at. You want that sin vanquished, and so does he; but he wants more. He wants all sin vanquished in you, and you made meet for his heavenly kingdom. He will teach you first by that stubborn evil within you, your utter weakness, your utter nothingness; and then he will teach you something else—a simple obedience to his commands, and a simple trust in his promises. You will do at last as he bids you; you will be forced to do so. Instead of looking for a triumph over sin solely or mainly from your own efforts, without intermitting those efforts you will learn to look for it from prayer, from a diligent use of the means of grace, from God's own uplifted arm. There will be the following of the ark round the city, and a silent listening to the trumpets, and a quiet waiting on the Lord; and all this perhaps for more than seven days or even seventy. And then we can tell you what will come at last—the Jericho in your soul will fall; the master-sin of your heart will be conquered; the difficulty which now stands in your path, will be got over. There will be some part of Canaan won; something of heaven's holiness and heaven's blessedness attained.

Others of you, it may be, have just gained such a victory as this. You are even now rejoicing over some bosom-sin which the Lord has enabled you to overcome. Happy are you! The Israelites wondering at this city's downfall, were not happier than you are now. To you I would say, Never build that vile

Jericho again. Never suffer it to be built. Watch over its ruins lest they should unawares be raised up. Look to the end of this chapter. "Cursed," says Joshua, "cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it"—a terrible curse; but there is a misery almost as great for you, if you dare to build up again in your heart that which God in his mercy has thrown down. It is hard to master a besetting sin the first time, but the second time—this is a victory which is seldom won. Satan is often stronger in a rebuilt garrison than in one which has never been demolished. A man led captive by sin a second time, is one of the most miserable men in the world. What says our Lord? "The last state of that man is worse than the first." God may give him the victory again, but neither seven days nor seventy will do now. The conflict may last almost all his days. It may send him down to his grave wounded and crippled.

And this also I would say to you, brethren—rejoice still in the ruins of those guilty walls. Bless God for every vanquished enemy and vanquished lust. He has left their ruins in you to keep you thankful as well as watchful; to remind you of what he has done for you and what he still can do. Look forward to other victories. If bought with a Saviour's blood, you are destined to be conquerors still, and "more than conquerors," triumphant conquerors, "through him that loved you." There is an hour coming when every strong hold within you shall be cast down, all the fortresses of the enemy taken, nothing left within you to keep peace and holiness out. O what an hour will that be, and what happy men will you be in it!—your hearts emptied of sin, perfectly emptied, even the ruins of it cleared away; not only every strong hold, "every high thing that exalteth itself" within you, pulled down, but every thought within you brought into "captivity to the obedience of Christ;" you holy men in a holy world! O long for this hour, and as you long for it, anticipate and expect it!

But there are some here to whom all this is a riddle. You have scarcely understood perhaps one word of this sermon. The fault may be mine. If so, may the Lord pardon me and humble me for it. But there is one passage of scripture I would just remind you of. It contains nothing more than your Lord's

own words. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." What if that quiet palace of this armed man is your heart? O brethren, if you are at peace while in bondage to the world or sin, at peace with Satan's strong holds all standing walled up within you, your pride and unbelief and earthly-mindedness and sensuality all undemolished, pray for yourselves; pray that you may be any thing rather than what you are. Willing captives to sin, its quiet slaves, and death coming on and eternity drawing near—O may the living God constrain you to take pity on yourselves! May he shew you mercy, and bring you by his mighty Spirit in alarm and supplication to his feet! Armed with his power, the mere sound of a trumpet threw down the walls of the guilty Jericho. O that the sound of his gospel might enter your hearts to-day, and throw down there every thing which keeps Christ out of those hearts and Christ's salvation!

SERMON XXXVI.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT OF CHRIST.

ST. JOHN XV. 12.—"This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you."

"A GRACIOUS command," says the Christian, "but who can obey it? To love others as this wonderful Saviour has loved me—I might as well attempt to rival him in his greatness, or outshine him in his glory." But we must not mistake our Lord's meaning. He means, I conceive, not that our love should equal his, but that it should be like his; not that it should be of the same strength, but of the same kind. "There is an ocean of love," he says, "in my breast. What I want is, that you should have a drop resembling that ocean in yours;

and not one drop or two, but as much as your hearts can hold."

You see then, brethren, what we have to do. It is to look, first, at the love of Christ as a pattern for ours, and then, secondly, to examine the charge he gives us to imitate it.

I. *The love of Christ*—we are to begin with this; but what can we say of it? The mind shrinks from any attempt to describe it. We feel that whatever we say, must disparage it. It transcends all description, for it transcends all thought. No love that we can conceive of, comes near it. No love that is to be found in any creature, will bear to be compared with it. And this Christ himself felt, for mark—in order to find a love resembling it, he is obliged to look into the boundless mind of the boundless God. "As the Father hath loved me," he says in this chapter, "so have I loved you. My Father's love is the only measure I can give you of mine, and not his love for his holy angels, but his love for me, his only begotten, his beloved Son." But still we do know something of this love, though we can never know it fully.

1. Remember how *free* it was. We did not merit it, we did not ask for it, we did not even desire it. And here is the wonder of it. It is love which found nothing to draw it forth. It was entirely self-moved. We are as unable to discover a reason for it, as to discover the beginning of eternity.

Disinterestedness then must be one main ingredient in the love we are to bear our fellow-men. There is nothing wrong in a love which springs from gratitude, or which is drawn out by the excellencies of others or the relation they stand in to us; but our love is not to wait for these things, or any thing else. It is not to stop and ask, "Why should I love that man? What has he done for me? What good is there in him?" That is a love like Christ's, which rises up within us without any thought, freely and spontaneously. It does not wait to be bought or won. There is a portion of it in a moment for every one who needs it.

2. And how *costly* too was the love of Christ!

Conceive of it as first rising in his mind. What mountains of difficulties were there in its way! "I love that ruined people," he might have said. "My heart melts within me at the contemplation of their misery. But how can I shew my love to them? What must I not give up? It will cost me

more than my whole creation is worth to save them." Well might he have buried deep in his own soul his soul's love. But "ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor." Moved by his grace, that is, by his own most free, unmerited love, he paid for our redemption the price that his law demanded. And what a price! We talk of it, but none save himself can understand its amount. For the living God to become man, and, when man, to walk our earth; for the Lord of glory to be made a curse, and the Lord of life to be laid down in a grave—we may think and think again, but here is something that passes all thought. We are lost and overwhelmed in its depths.

Shall I say that our love one for another ought to be thus self-denying? We feel that it cannot be. Let me rather say, Who can think of Bethlehem, and Gethsemane, and Calvary, the manger, and the garden, and the cross, and not wonder at his own selfishness?

Even in our love, this selfishness appears. Some of us must please themselves in their kindness, as well as in every thing else. They will help others, but it must be in their own way, and that a way which involves in it no sacrifice to themselves. Throw a difficulty, or risk, or even sometimes an inconvenience before them, and they will not help them at all. O to find a man who will break through any thing but the law of God for his fellow-man! That is the man, who embodies this precept of our Lord; a self-denying man, one who even in his love is willing to take up his cross and follow Christ.

3. How *compassionate* and *tender* is Christ's love!

In looking at its greatness, we often lose sight of this feature of it. We can hardly conceive that an affection so strong can be tender. But the softness of a mother's love never equalled our Lord's. The tenderest mother that ever breathed, never felt for her suffering babe as he feels for his suffering people, nay, for a suffering world. Read his life. It is not here and there, that his compassion comes out, it is every where. He does much for others, but we see that he feels more. Turn only to this last interview with his disciples. He was within a step of his bloody cross and passion. All the terrors of his last conflict were rushing in on him. Yet hear him talk, hear him pray—so mindful is he of the sorrows of these men, that he seems to forget his own. Here are four chapters to pray for

and comfort them, and scarcely more than four verses for himself.

And this is the point in which the love of many real Christians is most deficient. It is not compassionate, not tender. Our neighbours want our hearts as well as our hands, but they do not get them. We shrink from the pain of sympathy and the burden of pity. There is assistance for them, but no thought, no feeling; we need all the feeling we have for ourselves. But what is the world? It is a world of aching hearts and burdened spirits. There is tenfold more sorrow in men's minds, than pain in men's bodies, or sickness and poverty in men's houses. Would you shew it mercy? Then carry a feeling heart through it. This will do more for the world's comfort than the richest purse. And in this way St. Paul seems to interpret the text. "Bear ye one another's burdens," he says, "and so fulfil the law of Christ."

4. How *bountiful* too is Christ's love!

"Bring forth the best robe," said the prodigal's father to his servants, "and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet." Nothing is deemed too good by that tender-hearted parent for that recovered son. All his house affords is not deemed too much. And what does the Lord Jesus deem too good or too much for his recovered people? "No good thing," says the psalmist, "will he withhold from them." "All things," an apostle says, "are theirs." O the unsearchable riches of that soul, which is once united to the everlasting Saviour! To say that it has more than it will believe it has, is to say nothing. It would still be nothing to say that it has "exceeding abundantly above all it can ask or think." To know what it has, we must go over earth and heaven, time and eternity; we must fathom the depths and measure the heights of grace and glory; we must find out what is meant by the joy of the Lord and the likeness of God. And all these amazing riches the love of Christ has given it, freely and joyfully given. He found it wretched and miserable, poor and naked; he has clothed and adorned it, he has made it wealthier and happier than an angel of God.

And now he says again to us, "Love ye one another as I have loved you." His meaning is, "Freely ye have received, freely give." The measure of what our love is to do for others and give to others, is simply this, the measure of our ability to

give and do. That is Christ's standard in his love; it must be our standard in ours. True, there is a bound in the services we are to render to this man and that. There must be. If not, one man might take all we have. But a Christian heart will not be over anxious to discover that bound; and when it sees the line, it will not easily keep from passing over it. It would rather go a thousand steps beyond it, than stop short one on this side of it. "What must I give in this case? and what must I do in that?" Christian love never asks these questions. It says, "What may I give and do? How far may I go, and not go wrong?"

There is one thing more to be noticed.

5. Though discriminating, how *extensive* is Christ's love!

We may call it discriminating, for so it certainly is. Look at it as it appeared in him on earth. It took almost as many forms as love could take. The love of country was strong in him. How dear was Jerusalem to his heart! He mourned for it; he wept over it; he lingered about it, as though he could not bear to leave it; the most cruel treatment could not keep him from it. The love of the exiled David for it, or that of the weeping Jews in Babylon, was poor in comparison with his. We see in him too the love of kindred. In his dying moments he manifests it, commending his sorrowing mother to his disciple's care. And he was surely not a stranger to the love of friends. Witness Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus, and among his disciples, Peter and John.

But then look, at the same time, at the extent of our Master's love. Who was excluded from it? His enemies? No, with his last breath he prayed for the very men who murdered him. Or the world? He cannot love it as he loves his church; his holiness prevents him; but there is not a guilty being on the wide earth, whom he does not pity, bear with, and load daily with benefits. His love is like the sun in the heavens—they who are the nearest to it, are warmed and gladdened by it the most, but they who are the farthest off from it, at the utmost poles, behold its light.

And this is the unfailing character of all true Christian love. Worldly love is narrow, and generally becomes more so as we grow older. This is expansive. No one object can absorb it; no one house or family can hold it; no sect or party can confine it. It breaks through the bonds of neighbourhood and country; it has good-will, feeling, and pity, for a whole world.

Ask it whom it loves the most, it will say, "Apart from kindred and friends, those whom my Lord loves the most, his chosen people, my heavenly Father's children." But ask it again to name all it loves, "I cannot," it says; "think of miserable and perishing millions; I love them all."

Without adding more, we may take these as the chief points in which our love one for another must resemble the love of Christ to us. His was free, ours must be disinterested; his was costly, ours must be self-denying. There was unheard of compassion in his love; ours must be pitiful and tender. We must be liberal, for he was most bountiful. Our love must be diffusive and wide, for his was universal. We may have particular friendships and attachments; if we have warm hearts, we shall have them; but they must leave us at liberty to care and feel for all mankind.

II. Let us come now to *the charge our Lord gives us to imitate him in his love.*

"This," he says, "is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you." And his words are very emphatic. They tell us that we are thus to love one another for three reasons—there is a commandment that we should do so; it is Christ's commandment; it is his last and great commandment.

1. There is *a commandment* in the case.

By employing this word, Christ reminds us that we are under an obligation to love our brethren. The word is a silent, but a powerful appeal to our fears. He does not represent this love as something good and right for us to have; we must have it, he says. It is not recommended to us, it is enjoined.

And it is remarkable that our Lord, who seldom uses this word on other occasions, uses it again and again in reference to this love. "This is my commandment," he says here, "that ye love one another." And again in the seventeenth verse, "These things I command you that ye love one another." And yet again in the thirteenth chapter of this gospel, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." Here, you observe, is authority pressing down on us. We are to be without this love at our peril. O brethren, we little think what we are doing when we keep back the helping hand or the pitying heart from a suffering brother. We are setting up once more for our own masters. We are doing just what we did in

the days of our ignorance, before redeeming grace and mercy had found us—we are violating and despising the law of heaven. There is more than coldness of heart in this thing, there is disobedience and rebellion.

2. But again—"This," our Lord says, "is *my* commandment." He stamps it, you observe, with his own authority. In the thirteenth chapter, he takes it entirely to himself, just as though he were the author of it; "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." So far however there was nothing new in it. It was only, as St. John tells us, "the old commandment which we had from the beginning." But says our Lord, "I want you to connect this commandment with me. I give it you now as from myself. True, in substance it is a branch of my Father's law; but so dear is it to me, that I charge you to regard it in future as my law. Forget Moses and Sinai when you think of it; ascribe it only to me, your acknowledged Master and Lord. And that you may connect it with me, I remind you in it of all my affection and love for you. I press it on you by a new motive as well as a new authority. By all you have seen me bear, by all I am about to bear for you, by all the kindness and affection I have shewn you, by the still greater kindness your wondering eyes will soon behold in me; by my own illustrious example, I command you to love one another; yes, to love one another as I have loved you."

Viewed in this light, there is an appeal in this charge to our gratitude and affection. When our Lord calls it a commandment, he says, "Dread to despise it;" and when he calls it his commandment, he urges us by his mercies towards us to obey it.

And there may be a reference here to a custom of the times. We are told that each of the different sects among the Jews at this period, had some particular tenet or practice to distinguish it. One took this, and another that. "Now I," says our Lord, "fix on this as the mark and badge of my followers—mutual love. Look on me as compared with other masters and teachers. It is my love for my disciples, that above all things distinguishes me from them, my self-denial and self-abandonment. And a love like this shall distinguish my disciples themselves from all other men. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. You shall be as well known by this love, as the priests of the temple are by their garments, or the Roman soldiers by their standards."

3. And notice one word more in the text. "*This* is my commandment; this above all others; nay, I mention no other; this is my commandment, this alone."

And herein he manifests two things.

He shews us, first, *the amazing tenderness of his own love*. His heart at this time was running over with affection to these men. Had we been present and heard him speak of his requiring some one thing of them, he is going, we should have said, to bid them love him, to let nothing chill their attachment to him or banish him from their remembrance. But his love for them triumphs in his breast over every other feeling and desire. He sees them about to be left alone, hated and persecuted in the world, and knowing what mutual love could do to alleviate their sufferings, he says, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another;" that ye pity one another in your afflictions and labours which are coming on.

And we see here also *the importance in itself of this mutual love*. Our all-wise Lord would not have spoken thus emphatically of a trifle. He would not have allowed affection so to influence him, as to place a duty above all others, that was inferior to all others, or occupied a low place among them. His words tell us that here is one of the highest of all duties, the most beneficial and the most ennobling.

You remember what St. Paul says of this love—it is "the fulfilling of the law." And again he says, "The end of the commandment is charity." Just so our Lord speaks of it. He seems to represent it in the seventeenth verse, as the end and scope of all his other precepts; "These things I command you, that ye love one another." He certainly places it in the text at the summit of all virtues; "This is my commandment, the only commandment my dying lips shall give you, and I give you this because of its excellence and importance, that ye love one another as I have loved you."

And thus much for the meaning of this text. It urges us, in conclusion, to seek for ourselves a real, experimental knowledge of the love of Christ. And by this I mean, not simply such ideas concerning it as a sermon like this can give, but such a knowledge of it as flows from a participation in it; from feeling ourselves the happy objects of it; from embracing, tasting, and enjoying it. And if you ask me wherein the importance of this

lies, I might answer, all that is dear to us, or ought to be dear to us, as sinful and dying men, is involved in it. It is the love of Christ, his free, costly, abounding love, and it is this only, which can save our immortal spirits from the ruin that threatens them; and it is the will of God that this love shall save none, but those who become by experience inwardly acquainted with it. Are you thus acquainted with it, brethren? Have you felt its power? Then were the great trumpet to be this moment sounded from heaven, you are the men, and the only men, who would go from this congregation to a world of joy.

But this is not the light in which the text sets forth the importance of this knowledge. It speaks of the love of Christ, you observe, as a standard of obedience; and more—it implies that it is a most powerful motive to obedience. The inference we are to draw is this, that a man will never even know his duty, and most certainly will never perform it, till he knows in some measure what the love of Christ is. Love my neighbour and love my God without first seeing and feeling how my dying Lord has loved me? I might as well go out at midnight and look for warmth and light. No, brethren, a sinner's salvation and happiness all flows from the love of Christ; and all real obedience and holiness within his soul must be connected, I will not say with the enjoyment of this love, but with a heart-felt knowledge of it. Seek this knowledge then, pray for it, you who have it not; and you who have it, seek and pray for more of it. Contemplate more the love of Christ. Try to bring it more frequently and more closely before you in all its amazing greatness. Labour to come more and more under its influence. It is the sun that is to light you in this dark world, the sun that is to warm you, the sun that is to gladden you. It is the light and joy of the bright heaven you are seeking. O that it may often shine on you and be your light and joy in the way to heaven!

SERMON XXXVII.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ELI TREMBLING FOR THE ARK.

1 SAMUEL IV. 13.—“Lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the way-side watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God.”

THIS chapter begins with telling us of a battle that took place between Israel and the Philistines. The Israelites were defeated in it, and four thousand of them slain. But they resolved to fight again; and in order to ensure a victory, they sent to Shiloh for the ark of the covenant, that they might take it into the field with them.

The high priest at this time was Eli. Too infirm to go himself with the ark, it was carried to the camp by his sons Hophni and Phinehas, but the old man's heart followed it. There comes after a while a messenger from the army, and finds him as he is described in the text, seated by the way-side at the gate of the city, watching, anxious to catch the first news that should arrive; and wherefore? “His heart trembled,” we are told, “for the ark of God.”

And what was this ark? In itself, it was nothing more than a chest of wood about five feet long, and half as deep and wide; but of all the holy things the Jews possessed, it was the holiest. The names applied to it will shew us why.

It is called in this chapter “the ark of the covenant of God.” This was its common name, and it was so termed because it contained within it the tables of the law given to Moses on mount Sinai, together with a written copy of the many gracious promises which were made to Israel about the same time.

It is called also elsewhere “the ark of the testimony.” By the writings contained in it, it testified or bore witness to the people of what the Lord required of them, and what he had

pledged himself to do for them. It was a record of Jehovah's commands and promises.

And there was another name applied to it—"the ark of God's strength." "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest," says David, "thou and the ark of thy strength;" and so also he says in another psalm, with a reference to this very transaction, "He delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand." And why these lofty names for a thing so mean? For this reason. On the top of this ark stood what was called the mercy-seat. This was simply a lid or covering of gold with two carved cherubim on it, but between these cherubim shone forth a miraculous light, the shechinah, a token and symbol of the divine presence. Hence the Lord is said in this chapter, to "dwell between the cherubims." Here he manifested himself as really present with his people. The ark was the ark of his strength, because here he abode in his strength, and was seen to do so; he discovered on it and by it his greatness and glory. No wonder then that it was esteemed sacred. The people revered nothing earthly so much. They rejoiced and confided in it. While it was with them, they felt that the Lord God of their fathers was with them, that they might fly to him when they pleased for protection, and look to him for blessings.

And we too in the Christian church have our ark. This holy thing, you perceive, corresponded almost exactly, in the purposes to be answered by it, with Christ's holy gospel. It was in fact an emblem or type of it. Just as God manifested himself by it to Israel, made known to them his will, his gracious designs and purposes, his covenant, his power and goodness, and caused them to feel he was among them; so now he reveals himself to us in the gospel of his son. That gospel is a setting forth of his covenant with his spiritual Israel; it is a faithful testimony of all the wonderful things he has done and intends to do for them; it is an unveiling of his presence among them, of his love towards them, and, at the same time, of his greatness and glory.

It is clear then that we may apply the text, in the spirit of it, to the gospel of God, as well as to the ark of God. The two things are substantially the same. And thus applied, the truths it teaches us are these—

I. The servants of God sometimes tremble for the ark of God.

Eli trembled for it, and so at times do many holy men still. If we ask how this comes to pass, I answer,

1. *From the great love they have for it.*

Value a thing highly, and you will sit, as it were, by the way-side watching it; you will be anxious about it, or be tempted to be so; you will be afraid of losing it. What makes the tender mother fear for the infant that is out of her sight, or that seems in danger? Simply this—she loves her infant. And the people of God love the gospel, really, affectionately, deeply; better than they love any one earthly thing; yes, more than their money, or their friends, or their children, or all the world contains. Our Lord declares that it would be so. “The kingdom of heaven,” he says, “is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”

And look at this chapter. There sits Eli outside the gate of Shiloh, watching and trembling, and for what? for the life of his sons or the success of the army? Both these are in jeopardy, and he knows they are in jeopardy, but he is not trembling for them; he is afraid for the ark of God. And mark him again. Up comes to him a frightened, agitated messenger from the camp, “with his clothes rent and with earth on his head.” “What is there done, my son?” asks the anxious priest. “Israel,” the man says, “is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead”—there is a blow for a father—that surely is the last and worst news he can hear; but not so; something more terrible is yet to come. “The ark of God is taken,” adds the man; and then we read in the next verse, “it came to pass when he made mention of the ark of God, Eli fell from off the seat backward,” and in falling died. He heard with calmness of his slaughtered countrymen and dead sons, but the lost ark—he could not bear to hear of that; the tidings struck him down.

And look farther on in the chapter. Here is another scene of the same character: every mother will understand it. A woman lies faint and dying with her friends around her. They speak to her and try to comfort her. “Fear not,” they say, “for thou hast borne a son.” But she takes no notice of them or their comfort; “she answered not, neither did she regard them.” All she does is, she turns to her new-born babe and names it

"Ichabod," that is, the glory is gone; and then she dies calling out, "The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken." And this woman had a husband lying unburied at this time on the field of battle. She was no other than the wife of the slain Phinehas.

Does this seem to any of you extravagant or unnatural? It would not, if you were really the people of God. You would say, "I fear I do not love the gospel as that man and that woman loved their ark; but I know well that it ought to be so loved. I believe that many do so love it. So I wish to love it. God grant that the time may come when I actually may so love it! Lord, make thy gospel dearer to me than all the world."

2. But there is another reason why the people of God sometimes tremble for the ark—*they know something of its value to the people that possess it.*

As far as Eli himself was concerned, it mattered very little what now became of it. He was ninety and eight years old, we read, and consequently must have regarded himself as a dying man. True, he had often communed with Jehovah by the side of this ark, had seen the mysterious symbol of his presence grow brighter and brighter on it as the incense smoked and he ministered before it, had drunk into his inmost soul the unutterable joy of feeling himself with God; but all this was now as nothing. He thought of the mercies that holy thing had brought with it for more than four hundred years to his nation. It was the safeguard of Israel, it was the charter of her privileges, it was the token and pledge of the Lord's special favour towards her; and therefore, when it was in danger, he trembled.

And ask the Christian why he is so anxious for the gospel to be here or there. He does not always say, "Because I love the gospel, and wish it to be every where;" but rather, "There are many whom I love in that place, and they all need the gospel." The man has a feeling heart. There is his Master's spirit within him, a spirit of pity and love. "For my brethren and companions' sake," he says, "for my fellow-sinners' sake, for my country's sake, for a perishing world's sake, I care for the ark of God. It is the greatest treasure our poor bankrupt world has left, the only treasure. It is our life-boat, our last plank, in our dismal wreck. I know its value, and therefore I tremble for it."

3. *A consciousness of guilt* also will make the servants of God thus fearful.

It was this probably, which most troubled Eli when he saw the ark go from Shiloh. "His sons had made themselves vile," they had dishonoured God and his worship in Israel; and though he had remonstrated with them for their evil doings, he had not effectually stopped them. "He restrained them not," the foregoing chapter says. God therefore had told him that he would take the matter into his own hands, and avenge his injured honour by signal judgments on his family and himself. And now the ark is in danger, Eli doubtless remembers God's threatenings. More than twenty years have passed since they were uttered, but that matters not. They are about to be fulfilled, he thinks, and dreading the worst, or what seemed to him the worst, he trembles lest for his sin and the sin of his house, the ark should be lost.

We have just been looking at the Christian as a man of a benevolent heart; we must regard him now as a man of a tender conscience. Some of you never fear for the gospel. You never dream of its being taken away from you, or of any spiritual privilege being withdrawn. And we can tell at once who you are. You are men who do not know yourselves. You do not feel how unworthy you are of your spiritual mercies, how thankless you have long been for them, and how unprofitable and rebellious under them. You see no reason in yourselves why they should be withdrawn, and therefore you never fear that they will be withdrawn. But the real Christian is a man who carries about with him a heart that God has wounded. He feels every day he lives that he is a guilty sinner. When therefore he sees threatening appearances in the church, he is ready to apprehend danger in the church. "Here is God," he says, "coming out of his place to take vengeance;" or rather, "There is God departing from us; he is leaving us to ourselves." And instead of blaming others, his heart smites him, and he blames himself. "Is not this my work?" he says. "Talk not to me of other men's sins; I have no heart to hear of them. They are heavy perhaps, but not so heavy as mine. And besides, others around me would have honoured the gospel more, had I not so dishonoured it. If the ark goes from us, it has been driven away from us by my unprofitable and unholy life." O that we could at this hour hear such language as this from every man in our church! O that whenever danger seems to threaten our Zion, we would all think of the part we have had in bringing on

that danger! We blame others, and they may be worthy of blame, but it would become us better to blame ourselves. We are all guilty in this thing. May the Lord give us self-accusing, as well as anxious and trembling hearts!

From these three causes then, the people of God are sometimes in fear for the ark of God—they have a great love for it, they know something of its value, they have a lively feeling within them of their own guiltiness. And you see what will follow, beloved brethren, if you never fear for it—you have not much love for it, you know little or nothing of its value, you do not deeply feel your own guilt. In other words, you bear but little resemblance to the people of God.

II. I come now to another remark deducible from the text—*The servants of God have sometimes reason to fear for the ark of God.* Not only do they fear for it, as we have just seen; their fear, as we have now to see, may be well founded and right.

Some of you may ask how this can be. “The great God,” you may say, “will take care of his own glory in our world. Why should we be anxious for it?” I answer, God will indeed take care of his glory here, and of his ark and church also. He is able to do so, and he is pledged and determined to do so. He will ever have a people to praise him on the earth. In some corner or other of it, the great Shepherd of Israel will have his flock, and the King of Zion his subjects. The ungodly can no more drive his gospel out of it, than they can drive the stars from the firmament. Blessed be God for this! But we must remember that though the gospel will never be removed from the world, yet *it may be removed from this or that part of the world.* It is not entailed on any congregation, or parish, or kingdom. The God who has sent it to this parish, may take it away again, or suffer it to be driven away, or, worse still, allow it to wither away. The candlestick is a moveable thing. All the powers of earth and hell combined cannot destroy it or extinguish it, but it may burn far away from us and we may not see its light.

And this also must be considered—the *gospel has often been removed from one place to another.* The ark not only may be lost to a people, it has been lost. In the case before us, it was so. It was lost for a time to all Israel—the Philistines carried

it away ; and though Israel soon recovered it again, yet Shiloh never did. It was taken about the land from place to place for more than a hundred years, but it never returned here. "God forsook" for ever "the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men." There it stood an empty tabernacle, a deserted tent, a house without an inhabitant and its glory gone. And Shiloh itself became a desolation. So low did it sink, that would the Lord threaten with his vengeance any guilty city, he bids it look on this ruined town, and see how he can punish. "Go ye now," he says to Jerusalem, "unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it." "I will make this house," he says again, "like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse." And not only this, the whole tribe of Ephraim, within whose borders Shiloh was, shared in the punishment. The ark was transferred to another tribe, as well as another place. Hence the psalmist says again, "He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim," Joseph's son, "but chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved. And there he built his sanctuary like high palaces." And this sanctuary itself, God's glorious temple in Zion—where is it now? And where is the ark of God, that was carried into it with so much exultation and triumph? They have both perished ; not a vestige remains of either. And the tribe of Judah and the men of Zion—where are they? Not perished, but worse. They are every where, and every where "a taunt and an astonishment." The heart wonders and aches as it thinks of them.

And we must still go on—*there never yet has been any place blessed with the gospel, from which it has not sooner or later been removed.* Go over in your minds every land and place that has ever had it—the cities that first received and welcomed it in Asia its birth-place—Ephesus, and Pergamos, and Thyatira, and Sardis—God has dealt with them all, just as he dealt with Shiloh and Jerusalem before them ; his name is scarcely left in any one of them. And think of the towns and kingdoms which embraced the gospel after them—Corinth, and Rome, and Gaul, and Spain. The ark may still be there, but it is buried there amidst so much rubbish, that we hardly know where to look for it. And come to our own country. Gracious indeed has the Lord been to us, wonderfully gracious ; never has any land, since the sun first shone, been so favoured by heaven as ours ;

but when have we had the gospel faithfully and extensively preached among us for a hundred years together? Never. The candlestick has now burnt brightly and now dimly. If it has never been taken away from us, it has again and again well nigh gone out. We think it strange that in a land of bibles, and prayer-books, and churches, it should be so, but so it has been. Our protestant fathers have been almost as ignorant of God's truth in protestant England, as though England had been still covered with popish darkness.

The point I wish to establish by all this, is, not that we are about to lose the gospel, but that Christian men may be right in fearing we shall lose it; not that the gospel is about to leave our parish or country, but that we ought to look to ourselves lest it should leave us. It may be removed, it often has been removed, no place yet has enjoyed it without in the end forfeiting and losing it. Who then that really loves it, will not sometimes, like Eli, be anxious and tremble for it?

And here comes the question, Is there any reason to tremble for it now? And the only answer I need give to this question, is to turn again to the text, and draw from it this further remark—

III. *The servants of God have reason to tremble for the ark of God when it is either profaned or trusted in.* In this case it was both. Turn to the history.

You will find that though the Lord's anger had been kindled against Israel, in the first instance, by the wickedness spread over the land by Eli's sons, yet the immediate cause of the ark's departure from Israel was the use made of it on this occasion. And this involved the two things I have just mentioned.

1. *The people profaned the ark.* Who bade them send to Shiloh for it, and take it from its holy secrecy there into the tumult of a camp? The Lord had commanded Moses that it should be kept in "the secret place of his tabernacle;" but now to answer their earthly purposes, the command of God is to be set aside, the sacredness of the holy of holies to be violated, a battle-field to become the dwelling place of the ark of God. And the priests of God consented to this. The two sons of Eli, who had the charge of it, seem to have carried it to the camp without the least reluctance. If therefore a time should ever come in England when our people or rulers shall care less for the gospel, than they care for their own glory or power;

when God's church in England shall be given up into the hands of those who hate it; when men who ought to shield it from harm and are pledged by their office and solemn oaths to do so, shall cast it to any who will take it, and allow them to do with it whatsoever they will—let such a time come, and then there will indeed be cause to tremble for the ark of God. It is undervalued, it is profaned, and God will not bear this—it is in danger of being lost.

2. The Israelites also made too much of the ark; *they trusted in it*, and this at the very time that they undervalued and profaned it—a strange inconsistency, but yet a common one.

“Wherefore,” they said one to another after their first defeat, “hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?” So far well; they acknowledge, you perceive, the hand of God in their discomfiture; but instead of saying, “We have sinned against God; do not let us go out again with our hosts till we have humbled ourselves before him;” they say immediately, “Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh, that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.” Here is no humiliation, no reformation or promise of it, not even a single prayer for deliverance. All we see is only a blind, idolatrous confidence in the ark; the ark is to save them. And when it came into the camp, mark the effect produced by it—they shouted for joy as though the victory was already theirs. “All Israel shouted with a great shout,” it is said, “so that the earth rang again.” And how did all this end? In the noise of battle, and then in another and a worse defeat; “There fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen, and the ark of God was taken.” God was dishonoured by having his ark put in his place, and therefore he dishonoured it and the men who so exalted it. There lie the people of the Lord in slaughtered thousands, and there goes the ark itself, that sacred thing which none but a Levite must ever touch—it is carried by heathen hands amid heathen shouts to a heathen temple; it is lost to the Israel of God.

The inference we are to draw is plain—while we do not undervalue our spiritual privileges, we must never trust to them to protect us; nay, we must not expect them to protect even themselves. It is a great mistake to say, “The church and the gospel will defend themselves.” There is the ark in Dagon's temple, and if we conclude, because we have a spiritual church

and a preached gospel, that that church must stand and that gospel still be preached, God may teach us a terrible lesson. We may have Dagon in our temples. We may hear in them the song of popish idolatry or the infidel's shout. And worse still—some of us may join in that song and help to raise that shout. God may force men and angels to see in us that he will not have any thing in earth or heaven put above him; that he will dishonour any thing however excellent which takes from him his glory—Eli his servant and priest, Shiloh the place of his tabernacle, yea, the very ark wherein he dwells. He will deliver once more “his strength into captivity and his glory into the enemy's hand.”

And hence it is, brethren, that if you would know whether you at this time ought to fear for the ark of God, you must not look at the camp of the Philistines, the large, and vaunting, and already half-triumphant army of our enemies—come to the camp of Israel and look there. There, if any where, the danger lies. It is the church itself, that is generally the church's worst foe. If she falls, it will be her own worldly-mindedness and spiritual idolatry, her confidence in herself and her forgetfulness of God, that will bring her low. She will fall her own destroyer.

A few words in conclusion. There are perhaps some among you, who have listened to this sermon with little interest; and the reason, you would say, is a conviction in your minds that God's ark in this land is in no danger. There is no reason whatever, you tell us, for one fear concerning it. Perhaps you are right. God grant that you may be so!

But you are not sure you are right. You cannot be certain that the gospel is in no danger among us. And bear with me if I say, that your fearlessness concerning it is no proof of your love for it. I could tell you, and without any risk of mistake, what every true servant of God in this congregation would say on this point. It would be this, “I had rather be that old man trembling by the way-side at Shiloh for the ark of God, even without good cause for trembling, than I would be the richest and happiest man in all England or in all the world, who cares nothing about it.” May not your quietness, I would ask, proceed from your indifference? May you not be without fear for the gospel, because you really care very little about the gospel? You soon take alarm when your children or property seem in

danger. You can sometimes see danger a great way off, if your worldly prosperity is likely to be affected by it. Your feelings perhaps are kindled in a moment, if there is a hand or a tongue moved against your civil privileges. Why then this slowness of heart to apprehend evil and danger here? God grant, beloved brethren, that you may not be trifling with your own souls! God grant that while you profess to value the gospel, you may not care less for it than for the smallest earthly good you possess! There is a woe denounced against those who are at ease in Zion, when Zion is troubled; and there is woe on woe for those who hear of the salvation of Christ, and yet make light of it.

SERMON XXXVIII.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE DISCIPLES WONDERING AT THE DIFFICULTIES OF SALVATION.

ST. MARK x. 26, 27.—“They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus, looking upon them, saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God.”

SALVATION! What is there so desirable for us, brethren? It comprehends in it every real blessing we can think of. And what is there so necessary? It is the one thing needful for us; we must obtain it or perish. But here comes the word of God, and speaks to us of this much needed thing in almost fearful language. It represents it as exceedingly difficult to be obtained. It is far off from us, it says, and so far that no man living has power in himself to reach it. And is not this a very serious truth? May God grant that we may this day see and feel it to be such!

We find in the text three points for our consideration—first, the difficulties of salvation; then, the feelings of our Lord's

disciples with regard to these difficulties ; and then, his own judgment concerning them.

I. You know what salvation is. We are a company of guilty and polluted creatures, whom God has condemned for their crimes to everlasting wretchedness. Salvation is deliverance from this condemnation, and the placing of us pure and happy in God's own kingdom. This, the text intimates, is not an easy work. On the contrary, it sets it forth as a very difficult one. But we must take care that we do not mistake as to where the difficulty lies. It is not in God ; he is as mighty to save as omnipotence can make him. And it is not in Christ ; "for he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him." And it does not lie in any reluctance either in God or in Christ to put forth the saving power which is in them. They are as willing to help us, as they are able. They could not be more willing. They delight in shewing mercy to sinners. There is nothing they delight in so much. We must look elsewhere then for these sad difficulties ; and we need not look far for them ; they are found in ourselves. They consist in things within our own hearts, which oppose themselves to the salvation God is willing to give us, and thus create a difficulty where otherwise there would be none.

There is a difficulty arising out of the pride of our hearts—*the difficulty of falling in with God's way of saving us.*

He tells us that his salvation is entirely of grace, that we must be saved, if we are saved at all, solely by his free mercy. We are not to go to him for his help as servants claiming wages, but as beggars imploring alms. And we do not like this way of going to him. It mortifies and humbles us. We think it degrades us. Our hearts must be half-broken before we can ever be brought to submit to it ; and long after we have submitted to it, we shall find our self-sufficient minds frequently revolting against it. It often takes a whole life of painful discipline heartily to convince a man that nothing but God's pure mercy can save his guilty soul.

And then there is *the difficulty of complying with God's terms of salvation.* We must trace this to the unbelief of our hearts.

God offers us salvation on the very easiest terms on which it could possibly be offered us. We cannot think of easier. So

light are they, that it seems to be doing a wrong to his goodness to speak of them as any terms at all. "By grace ye are saved," he says, "through faith." "He that believeth shall be saved." All he asks of us is, that we shall give credit to the declarations of mercy he makes to sinners in the gospel; that we shall believe him, when he speaks to us from heaven, and says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. There is redemption for you through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." This he requires of us, but he requires no more.

And where, we may ask, lies the hindrance here? What difficulty can there be in believing declarations so gracious and so true? There is none at all, as long as we know nothing feelingly of our own guilt and vileness; at least, none of which we are conscious. But let the Spirit of God once make us feel what we really are, let a sense of our great sinfulness once lay hold of us, and the case is immediately altered. We find out now that faith in God's promises of mercy is one of the most difficult things in the world. "Mercy for us," we say, "and such mercy? mercy so free, so abundant, so glorious? It cannot be." We can believe God, when God denounces against us in his word the terrors of his wrath, for we feel that they are our just portion, we have merited them all; but when he tells us that his own everlasting Son has come down from the skies to save us, that he has taken on him our form, and been wounded and bruised, crucified and slain, in that form for our sakes; when he says that he has opened wide for us the doors of his own holy kingdom, and that we, base and criminal as we are, have boldness, through the blood of his Son, freely to enter in—we know not what to think. He seems almost to mock us. Such amazing goodness we cannot believe to be real.

It is often said that we easily receive as true what we desire to be true, and so in ordinary cases it may be, but not so always; perhaps it is never so in a matter that very deeply interests us. We then are commonly the most backward to credit the very thing which of all others we should most rejoice to credit. "Joseph is yet alive," said the sons of Jacob to their father. They could not have brought to that old man more joyful tidings. But "Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not." "Behold my hands and my feet," said our risen Lord to his disciples, "that it is I myself." And then we read, "he shewed them his hands and his feet," he took pains to convince

them that their own beloved Master was again before them; but for a while the wondering men, it is said, "believed not for joy." And so with the sin-stricken penitent. The tidings brought to him in the gospel, seem to him too good to be credited. He longs to believe them; he would give worlds, were worlds his, to believe them; but he knows not how, he cannot.

And there is another difficulty still behind; it springs from the corruption of our hearts—the *difficulty of our seeking, or even accepting, such a salvation as God offers us.*

That we may understand this, we must remember that salvation is not merely a taking of us away from one world and placing us in another; it consists quite as much in a great change wrought within our own minds. It is a deliverance from the love and power of sin. Accordingly we read that our Lord is to be called Jesus or Saviour, "for he shall save his people from their sins." "God sent him to bless you," St. Peter tells the Jews, "in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." It follows then that salvation is another word for holiness; or if that should seem to be going too far, we may say, without any risk of mistake, that there is no salvation without holiness; that holiness forms a part and a main part of salvation.

Now we who are to receive this holy salvation, are by nature in a most unholy state. Our hearts are "full of evil." They are "desperately wicked." And worse than this, not only are they not subject to God's law, they cannot be subject to it, and for this plain reason—they are in a state of enmity against that law, and the God who is the author of it. Can we wonder then that we find it a difficult thing to be saved? Here is not only an humbling way of salvation to be submitted to, and strange terms of salvation to be complied with; but when these difficulties are overcome, here is a greater difficulty than all in the character of this salvation itself. It is not the salvation we wish for. It is the very last salvation we should naturally choose. It crucifies within us all that nature delights in, and gives a death-blow to all that nature would keep alive. And what does it propose to put within us in their stead? Desires and feelings in which nature can take no pleasure, which war against nature, and make our lives, as long as we live on earth, a wearisome and painful conflict.

Besides, we have something more to do than to receive this

holy salvation ; we have to “work it out.” We are to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.” Had we nothing more to do than to lie passive in God’s hand while he sanctified us, this would not be easy ; but we are to go beyond this ; we are to concur with God in the work of our sanctification, and the most painful part of it we are to accomplish. We ourselves are to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.” Not only is the right hand to come off, we are to “cut it off ;” not only is the right eye to come out, we are to “pluck it out.” And is this easy ? Let those say who have in good earnest set about the work. They will tell us with one voice, that the hardest bodily labour toil-worn man ever knew, is nothing when compared with the inward labour of resisting and vanquishing a bosom-lust.

And here we must leave this part of our subject. I have said however but little of what might be said on it. The difficulties you have heard mentioned, are only a few out of many, and many that all of you will assuredly meet with and must overcome, if ever you reach heaven, or even go on far in the way which leads to it.

II. Let us come now to *what the disciples felt at the prospect of these difficulties.*

Two of their feelings are mentioned.

Wonder is one of them, and great wonder ; “They were astonished out of measure.”

If you look to the twenty-fourth verse, you will find that they had been astonished before from the same cause. A young ruler of the Jews had come to our Lord, and asked him, with much apparent sincerity and earnestness, what he must do to inherit eternal life. Christ told him ; but the man did not like what was told him ; it involved the sacrifice of all his earthly possessions, and not being prepared for such a sacrifice, he went away sad and grieved. Jesus immediately turns to his disciples, and referring to this half-hearted enquirer, exclaims in the sorrow of his heart, “How hardly shall they that have riches, enter into the kingdom of God !” And then, we read, “the disciples were astonished at his words.” But mark—in- stead of explaining them away, he repeats and strengthens them, and thus increases tenfold the wonder of his followers. They

are astonished now "out of measure," exceedingly astonished, confounded with amazement.

And just so is it, at the outset of their course, with most of Christ's true disciples. There was a time when they deemed salvation an easy thing, nothing easier. It required, they conceived, very little from them, and that little they could do at any time and almost without an effort. Instead of saying with these men, "Who can be saved?" they would rather have said, and perhaps did say, "God is very merciful; who can be lost?" But how long did they talk thus? Just as long as they continued careless about their eternal destiny. No sooner did the Holy Spirit make them alive to their spiritual welfare, no sooner did he convince them of their guilt and danger, than the same wonder came on them, that this text describes. They wondered at many things, at their former unconcern, their former blindness, the patience of God in bearing with them, his goodness in discovering to them their folly, his amazing grace in providing for them a Saviour; but what they wonder at almost as much as any thing, is the mountain of difficulties, which lies between them and heaven. A little while ago they thought there was nothing to do, and if there had been ever so much, they would have felt they could do it. They feel now that they can do nothing, and yet more than they dare think of, they see must be done before they can be saved. Some of you perhaps at this present hour may be nearly in this frame of mind. You may be astonished out of measure at the difficulties before you. See here then that others have been astonished before you, and they men who are now in heaven. Your wonder will not save your souls, but it is a token for good. It is a proof that you differ in one thing from the merely nominal Christian, and resemble in one thing the true disciples of your Lord. God grant that you may soon resemble them in many things!

The other feeling we discover in these men is *despair*, or something very much like it. "Who," they ask, "can be saved?" And they do not ask this question for information. They do not address it to Christ, nor do they seem to expect any answer to it. They speak like men who are tempted to give up all for lost, or have already done so. "They say among themselves, Who then can be saved?" It is another way of saying, "None can be saved: we must all be lost."

And this also among young disciples is still a common feel-

ing. When it pleases God to call us out of our natural state of ignorance, and we begin to discover for the first time the spiritual difficulties before us, we are not always at once dismayed by them. We behold them rising up one after another in our way; but though astonished and alarmed, we try to grapple with them and hope to overcome them. Like young soldiers who have never faced an enemy, we are eager for the conflict and calculate on an easy victory. But this does not last long. Scarcely is the battle begun, when we think of a retreat. We are soon taught that though so much is to be done, we can do nothing; and ignorant as yet of the strength provided for us, we are ready to say, with feelings of wonder and sorrow, "The work never can be accomplished: our lost souls never can be saved." Easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God? "Yes," we say, "any thing would be easier than for men like us to enter there." And then comes into the heart a feeling of sorrow and despair, that well nigh breaks it; or worse—a feeling which tempts us to turn aside altogether from God. See it at work in desponding Israel. "There is no hope; no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." And again; "There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart." A painful state of mind, brethren, and a most dangerous one; but thousands have been brought into it by the unexpected difficulties they have met with in the ways of God. And if we look at these difficulties alone, we certainly shall be brought into it. Turn to Israel in the wilderness. We wonder at their folly as we see them looking back with desire to the land of their captivity, and why? We think of the Canaan before them, and the cloud and pillar above them, and the presence and aid of their mighty God. But lose sight of all these; think only of the burning sands of that wilderness, its howling wastes, its wearisome journeyings, and its continually recurring hardships and disappointments; and do we wonder now that Israel grew tired of it and wished for Egypt? We wonder rather that they continued for forty years to travel on in it. One thing is most certain—we must learn to look beyond our spiritual difficulties, if ever we would be carried over them.

III. Let us come now to *our Lord's judgment* concerning

this matter. The disciples wondered and despaired at the difficulties of salvation. The question is—were they right or wrong in doing so?

Of their wonder, Christ takes no notice whatever; at least, he says nothing to them concerning it. A sinner in his way to heaven will be continually wondering, and the Lord Jesus will leave him to wonder on; yea, will be continually deepening his wonder by revealing to him more and more of the mysteries of his kingdom. And O how will he wonder at last, when he finds himself in the presence of Jehovah, and in the blaze of his glory!

But our Lord does not leave the despair of these men unnoticed. As soon as he sees it, he seeks to remove it. "Who," they ask, "can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them, saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God." In this answer, you perceive, he partly confirms and partly sets aside the estimate they had formed of the difficulties we are considering. "You are right," he says, "up to a certain point; beyond that you are altogether wrong."

They were partially right. Their question implies that it is exceedingly difficult for any man to overcome the obstacles between him and heaven. "It is so," answers Christ; "nay, it is more than difficult, it is impracticable; by human power, the thing can in no case be done. With men it is impossible." And this is the point, brethren, to which it is so hard to bring a sinner; to bring him, I mean, to despair, not of salvation, but of his own power to attain salvation; to lead him to see that he is as weak as he is sinful, and helpless as well as weak; to make him feel that he can do no more by his own strength to save his soul, than he can to lift up a mountain or create a world. And this is the point to which it is absolutely necessary for every man to be brought. Strange as it may sound, it is yet most true—till men are persuaded they can do nothing, nothing in this case will they ever do. We never take one step towards heaven till we feel we are spiritually crippled, and have not power to move. Self-sufficiency, like self-righteousness, is a ruinous thing. It is an insurmountable obstacle in our journey heavenwards. And therefore to beat it down, our Lord says here, "With men it is impossible;" and therefore too he makes in another place that startling declaration, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him." Mark,

he does not say, "No man can be saved by me," but, "No man can come to me for salvation, can really apply to me or ask me for it, except God bring him."

But these disciples were also wrong. Their question intimates that the salvation of the soul is attended with such difficulties, that no man living has power to overcome them. And this is true, answers Christ. But then they go farther, and imply that these difficulties can in no way be surmounted. It is clear that they had man's power only in their mind; they never thought of any other power being brought to bear on the impediments they were wondering at; and hence they came to a wrong conclusion concerning them. But our Lord sets them right. Looking earnestly upon them, as though he pitied their ignorance and yet was almost ready to upbraid them for it, he says to them, "With men it is impossible, but not with God." He tells them there was one truth they had quite lost sight of—the saving of a guilty soul was never intended to be man's work; God himself has taken it into his own hands. And then he reminds them, that whatever God undertakes, he can perform. "With him," he says, "all things are possible; and if all things, then your salvation. No matter what impediments are lying in the way, there is Omnipotence to carry you over them. There is the power that created you, the power that built the heavens and the earth, the power that reaches to every living thing, to angels in heaven and angels in hell, to every heart which beats on the earth and can do with every heart just what it will—there is this for you to hope in. There is Jehovah's own right hand already stretched out for you, and that hand will never leave one who is my true disciple, short of heaven."

And observe how compassionately he says this. He himself was the mighty God, yet because his power was now hidden beneath the semblance of human weakness, he makes here no mention of it. Remembering the low conceptions his disciples had of him, and anxious to lift them at once above their despondency, he reminds them at once, not of his own, but of God's omnipotence. We know what he might have said. "Who, you ask, can be saved? O fools and slow of heart to believe, why, every one that comes to me for salvation. You deem me merciful and gracious only, willing to save sinners if I can; but I am mighty to save, yea, almighty; I can save the guiltiest

and I can save the weakest. You yourselves have already felt my power; with one word I brought you from your fishing nets and your seats of custom to follow me; and you shall soon feel it more. Before me these mountains that trouble you, shall become a plain. I will work for you and I will work within you. You shall wonder at my power. You shall say that I am able to save them to the uttermost that would come unto God by me." O brethren, what an amazing mercy is it that there should be a possibility of salvation in any way for sinners such as we! and what amazing condescension, that the living God should have made it possible by taking the difficult work out of our hands into his own!

And here ends the text. Let me briefly apply it to three classes of persons among us.

Some of you know nothing at all of the difficulties of salvation. You are going to heaven, you think, but you are going there with so little effort or labour, that you can scarcely tell what a spiritual difficulty means. All I would say to you is, judge for yourselves—does such a religion as yours harmonize with the language of these disciples, and with the language of our Lord? Compare it with this scripture. Bring it only to the test of this one text. If it will not bear the trial, what is it worth? O be persuaded to cast the base thing away! Like that of the young man in this chapter, it may do many things and observe many things, but it is as surely a counterfeit, as the blessed book which contains this text, is true.

Others of you, like these disciples, have just begun to see the difficulties that lie before you. They dishearten perhaps as well as astonish you; but to you also we would say, judge for yourselves—ought they to dishearten you? We can point to this text, and tell you that you have no more reason to be discouraged on account of them, than as though they had no existence. Difficulties they certainly are, and quite as numerous and formidable as you suppose them; and God will not at once remove them out of your way, nor alter their nature. There they stand, and you must get over them. Nay, he calls on you to face them and get over them. He demands of you in your weakness as much effort and as many achievements as though you possessed more than an angel's strength. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," he says, "and the violent take it

by force." And how is this? The question is answered in a moment—you may make use of his strength as your own. You may turn to him for as much as you need of it, and whenever you wish to turn to him, and he will give you more of it than you ask. He will "grant you to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." Despair? Yes, nothing so reasonable and right when we think of ourselves; nothing more unreasonable when we think of God. An infant in a tender mother's arms might as well say, "I must perish, for I cannot stand;" or a man with a monarch's treasures at his command, say, "I must starve, for I have not in my purse a mite." The design of this scripture in your case is two-fold. It is intended on the one hand, to make you feel that you are utterly helpless; and, on the other, to shew you that you have within your reach a strength that is boundless. "Cursed is he that maketh flesh his arm," it says; and then it says again, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." And what ought your answer to be? God himself tells you; "Let the weak say, I am strong." A prophet tells you; "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." And an apostle also; "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

A few of you perhaps have been long accustomed to spiritual difficulties. If so, you have been long familiar also with a strength which has enabled you to surmount them. This scripture bids you think of the remainder of your course without fear. A little more struggling you certainly will have; perhaps much more, and that of a severer kind than any you have yet endured; but what matters it? "With God all things are possible." Your trials may seem to have weakened you, to have exhausted your strength, and to have rendered you less equal for future efforts; but what was your strength at first? Greater than now? No; it was then perfect weakness. And what if it could be less now? "The Lord fainteth not, neither is weary." He is as strong now as when with his omnipotent hand he first led you out of a wicked world, and that hand shall perfect that which concerneth you. The creature's utter helplessness, the all-sufficiency of the great God, your Saviour—keep only these two things in mind, and, through the power of the Holy Ghost, you shall be carried triumphantly to glory. None shall be saved if you are lost.

SERMON XXXIX.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

REST IN CHRIST FOR THE HEAVY-LADEN.

ST. MATTHEW XI. 28.—“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

How very frequently have we heard and read this gracious invitation! Have we ever really complied with it? I pray God that it may reach some heart this day, that has never before been affected by it; and O that many of you would now put up this prayer, each one for himself, “Lord, let that heart be mine!”

Here is a blessing offered to us, and we are told four things concerning it—first, what it is; secondly, who gives it; thirdly, who may have it; and, lastly, how they may obtain it.

I. We are told *what it is*. Our Lord calls it “rest,” but it is not the rest most of us wish for. Some of us want rest in sin. We want to walk in our own ways and follow our own pleasure, and not be disquieted while we are doing so. There is the worldly-minded man—he wants to have a flourishing business and no anxiety with it, and much property without any care coming out of it. And there is the proud and vain man—he wants a great deal of respect and honour in the world, with nothing to mortify or vex him. All such men might as well say, “Let us lie down among thorns, and not one of them ever pierce us.”

Nor is the rest here offered us, that which the godly part of us often long for. You want rest from trouble, brethren, or rest from temptation, or rest from the world’s hatred and ill treatment, or else, more than all, rest from inward struggles and warfare. But you also must be disappointed. You cannot

have what you want; or, if you have it for a while, it will soon be gone. It is something to be hoped for and waited for, not at present enjoyed.

The rest our Lord speaks of is, first, rest from sin, not in it; and then rest in trouble, not from it.

It is rest from sin; rest from the guilt of it; a pacified and quiet conscience; not a dead conscience, but one that is alive, and works, and has in times past grievously tormented us, but now torments us no longer. There is a voice which has said to it from heaven, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and that gives it peace.

And it is a rest from the power and misery of sin. O how this accursed thing leads some of us captive! and how miserable it makes us while it does so! Now and then indeed comes a little pleasure from it, but such pleasure! it ends, and ends soon, in gall and bitterness. And God will not alter the nature of things to save us from this suffering and disappointment. Sin and misery ever have gone together in his universe, and, as long as he is Lord of it, ever will. What we really need is to have the love of sin subdued in us, and its power broken. What we require is, not to have the world altered, but ourselves; not to have the objects around us become less disappointing and harassing, but to care less about them; to be crucified to the world and weaned from it; to live in fact above it. And all this can be done. And when by God's Spirit it is done in the soul, the soul enters into rest. It begins to know, for the first time in its existence, what real quietness means.

And this rest, observe again, is *rest in trouble*.

"I will not take trouble from you," says the Lord Jesus. "If you are my people, I cannot. It is one of the things appointed for you in the everlasting covenant. But here notwithstanding is rest for you, here is quietness of mind for you, in the very thick of trouble." It is a rest from self-will, that he offers us, from unbelief, from impatience. It consists mainly in a willingness to be afflicted, in inward consolations imparted while we are afflicted, in a settled hope of a happy issue to our afflictions, and in a strength which enables us to sustain them. "Let me leave the field," cries the soldier; "give me rest." "No," says the general, "the battle is not over; you must stay here and fight:" but he gives the soldier refreshment; he sends him aid and relief; he cheers him on with his voice and presence; he enables him to beat down foe after foe: the man sees a final

victory and triumph before him, and what cares he now about the rest he wanted? "I have a better rest here," he says; "rest amid toil and conflict. The victories I am gaining refresh me; and if they did not, my general's presence would, and the glory before me would. I shall soon have a crown of life." And this, you remember, is the sense attached to this passage in our sacramental service; "Come unto me, and I will refresh you;" that is, strengthen and comfort you.

We see then what the blessing is, which the text offers us. It is rest, rest in trouble and rest from sin.

II. And now for another enquiry—*of whom is this blessing to be obtained!* "It is to be obtained of me," says the Lord Jesus. "I will give it you."

And mark the conscious greatness these few simple words indicate. We are accustomed to admire their graciousness only, but there is a wonderful loftiness in them, a breaking forth of the Saviour's majesty and Godhead.

Have you often tried, brethren, to comfort a troubled heart? If so, you must have found that the work is frequently beyond your power. It is always beyond it, unless it pleases God to make use of you as an instrument to perform it. No creature can give rest to a restless soul. All creatures together could not do it. Were all the men and angels in existence to be striving together to put peace into only one aching heart, they would strive in vain. It is the great prerogative of him who made the soul, to impart rest to it. No other can. "I," he says, "create the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace to him that is far off and to him that is nigh, saith the Lord." "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." But here comes our Lord claiming this high prerogative of Jehovah for himself. He takes up Jehovah's own lofty language, and says, "I will give you rest. I will refresh you." He does not say, as the prophets of old did, "Turn to the Lord, and the Lord will comfort you;" but, "Come to me, and I will comfort you." The reason is, he who spake these words, is himself the Lord of hosts; this gracious Saviour is himself the everlasting Jehovah. The Being who tells us here that he has rest for us, is the source of all happiness, the spring from which flows, as from a fountain, all the bliss of heaven. All heaven rejoices in him, and lives upon him, and looks up to him as its

light and glory. And he is the Being too who has all hearts at his command, and can do with them whatsoever he will; fill them to the full with sorrow and bitterness, or make them overflow, if it so pleases him, with comfort and joy. It is clear then that we are not invited in this scripture to come for rest to one who has no rest to give us, or not enough for all of us. There is more power in him to comfort, than there is in the world, or in any thing, to disquiet. There is more comfort in him for sinners, than there is water in the ocean or light in the sun. His invitation is given with all the fearlessness of conscious abundance; and for this reason—he knows that he has enough and to spare for a whole suffering world.

III. And now comes a third question—*who may obtain this rest from him?* Here is a great blessing offered us; who may have it? Every one, the text says, who desires or needs it—they “that labour and are heavy-laden,” and “all” of them.

Would it be possible, brethren, for two words to express more naturally the inward condition of man? Our Lord shews his knowledge of our hearts, as well as his compassion towards us, in making use of them. We do indeed “labour.” The word in the original signifies to toil, to labour to weariness and faintness. It is the same word that is used when our Lord is described as sitting down near Jacob’s well, “wearied with his journey.” So Jeremiah says of the wicked, that they “weary themselves to commit iniquity.” And how true is this! Who can seek his happiness away from God, and not grow tired indeed in the search? Some of you may say perhaps, “We can; the world has not yet tired us.” But who are you that say so? You are young men. The day of life is scarcely begun with you; you know nothing yet of its noon-tide heat and burden. Labour on in the world till the evening of life comes, and what will you say then? We can tell you. You will say, “The world has not only deceived us, it has worn us out. All things in it are full of labour. We have found them so. Our souls are weary of it.” You may now think the service of God a hard service, but it is not half so hard as you will one day think an evil world’s service. Nothing so toilsome as going about seeking rest and finding none, labouring to satisfy an immortal soul with mortal things. It is compared, in the tenth chapter of Ecclesiastes, to a man’s wearying himself to reach a city that he

cannot find. And look through that book—more than twenty times over is the worldly man's life expressed in it by this one word "labour." Do any of you understand this? Am I speaking to any who feel well nigh worn out with toils, and cares, and disappointments? Then you are among the men whom the blessed Jesus had in his mind, when he uttered these words. There is rest in him for you.

And then comes another word, "the heavy-laden." This also describes some of us well. It represents us as carrying about a burden, and a burden heavier than we can well bear.

There is the burden of affliction. Are any of you sinking under that? feeling that you could not possibly bear more than you are now bearing, and fearful that you cannot bear even this long? Then you doubtless are included in this invitation. You may not be God's people, you may never yet have served God or sought him; but you are heavy-laden, and that is enough; there is rest in Christ for you.

There is the burden of guilt also. And what burden so heavy as this? It is a crushing load. It fell on the world, and the world became a ruin. It brought down angels from heaven, and sunk them into a bottomless deep. And when it was laid on the mighty Saviour, he who had borne so much, could scarcely find strength to bear this: he cried out in the anguish of his soul for deliverance from it. But we must feel it ourselves in order to understand what it is. Some of you perhaps are feeling it now. It has pleased God, by his all-powerful Spirit, to open your understanding and awaken your conscience. He has spread out your sins before you, and forced you to look at them. And if so, you do indeed "groan being burdened." There is a weight on your soul heavier than all the sorrows of life could put there, and one which you find you cannot throw off. You would give all you have in the world to get rid of it, and leap for joy to give it. You would be the poorest beggar that ever begged his bread from door to door, so that your mountain of guilt might be removed off you. Brethren, if there is rest for any one in Christ, there is rest in him for you. He is a Saviour from sorrow, but he does not take his name of Saviour from that—he is a Saviour from sin. All that guilt which is now alarming and oppressing you, he is able to remove from you; to cast it, he says, into the depths of the sea; yea, to destroy it. What you want is pardon, and such a pardon as will secure you for

ever from God's condemnation; and here it is. Such a pardon the Lord Jesus has bought for you, and bought it at the price of his own blood. He died on the cross at Jerusalem, that he might obtain it for you; he is gone up to his throne in the heavens, that he may bestow it on you. Would it bring you rest? Is it the very thing above all others, that your souls desire? Then his language to you is, "Come unto me and I will give it you. I can give it you. I have it to give. Me hath my Father exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

And let me just say, that to go to Christ for any other blessing, and not to go to him for this, is to trifle with him. To ask him for comfort under trouble, while there is a load of guilt on us sinking us into hell, is folly indeed. As well might a sick man ask a physician for every thing but medicine to heal him, or a starving man say, "Give me this and give me that," but never, though dying for want of it, "Give me food."

There is yet another burden—the burden of our corruptions, the evil workings of our own evil hearts. The weight of these many of us do not feel, or, if we do feel it, we are content to bear it. Go round this congregation—many here would say, "Our hearts are in the main good. You speak of inward corruptions, but we are free from such things." Others would say, "We have them, we know; but they give us no pain or very little." But let a few here speak. "O," they would say, "these are our burdens. These are the things we find it hard to bear. Here within our own breasts lie our troubles." And the men who would say this, are the best and holiest of us all. Think of Paul. The very remainder of these things made him groan. "O wretched man that I am," he cries out, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" this hated, loathsome, intolerable load. Is this your language, brethren? Then you also may turn to this invitation, and say, it is meant for you. There is a rest in Christ from sin, a rest from it on earth, a partial though not a complete rest; and you who are heavy-laden with sin, are invited to seek it in him. We know not how much Christ can do for us under any burden till we try him, and if there is any one thing in which he does more than we expect from him, it is in the victory he sometimes gives us over our own hearts. "This evil desire," we say, "cannot be mastered; this inordinate affection cannot be laid low;" but it is mastered, it

is laid low. We are obliged to say again with Paul, "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord."

We have now gone through the greater part of the text. We have seen, first, what the blessing is, which it offers us; then, of whom it may be obtained; and then, who among us may have it.

IV. But we have yet a fourth point to enquire into, and that is, *how they who desire it, may obtain it*. Our Lord says they are to go to him for it; "Come unto me, and I will give it you."

But what does he mean by coming to him? Even when he was on earth, he could not mean by it literally coming into his presence. Judas was there, and multitudes of other sinners, who never found rest in him and never sought it. He meant then, and he means now, a turning of the soul to him. You know what is meant by going to the world for happiness—it is trying to get happiness out of the world; it is seeking it from worldly pursuits and objects. Going to Christ then for it, is to put Christ in the world's place. It is for the burdened soul to seek its rest in Christ, just as the worldly man seeks his in worldly things.

It is sometimes said that coming to Christ is the same as believing on him, and it is the same; but then, observe, it is faith in operation, faith leading the soul to act on what it credits. The mere belief that Christ has rest for me, will not of itself bring it me, any more than knowing there was a well of water near her, would have saved Hagar from perishing in the wilderness. She went to the well, took water from it, and drank; and so was saved. And I, if I would have my wearied soul repose in Christ, must send up my thoughts and desires to Christ, must fasten my expectations on him. I must, by his Spirit leading me, come to him. The feelings of my heart towards him must be feelings of dependence, and supplication, and hope. "I know, Lord, there is rest in thee for the weary. Lord, I am weary; give me rest. I am oppressed, undertake for me. The world cannot help me, I feel that it cannot; but thou canst. What wait I for? My hope, my only hope, is in thee."

To those of us, who have already found rest in Christ, I would say, remember where you have found it. Did you ever find it any where before you found it here? When your hearts

ached, could the world give ease to them? and when conscience accused you, could your own righteousness, or repentance, or any thing you could suffer or do, silence it? What first made you quiet and happy men? You will all say with one voice, "Our quietness came down from heaven. The Lord Jesus gave it us. He told us of his great atoning sacrifice, his spotless righteousness, his mighty intercession, his omnipotent grace; and in these we first found rest, and find it still." What you are to learn from this scripture is, never for one moment to seek it elsewhere. You are not to treat this as an invitation given to the awakened sinner only, as an invitation you have accepted and done with. You are to regard it rather as the Saviour's language to his own church and people, his constant language to you. O make this your prayer whenever you read it or think of it, that you may look on him every hour you live, not only as the great Saviour of your soul, but as your soul's happiness and rest.

Let those of us, who desire to find rest in Christ, see here on what easy terms they can obtain it. "Come unto me," he says to them, "and I will give it you." There is rest for you, for every one of you, by simply turning to the Lord Jesus Christ for it. And you can have it, brethren, in no other way. You must come to Christ for it if you ever have it. None but he can give it you; and he will never give it you unless you turn to him.

And see here too that he is willing you should turn to him and have it. Notice once again whom he invites. He does not call to him those who love, or trust, or serve him. He does not say, "Come my redeemed, my beloved, my chosen." He says, "Come, ye that labour and are heavy-laden; and come, all of you. It matters not to me who you are or what; how guilty or how miserable; how long you have kept away from me, or how much you deserve to be driven away from me now. All I ask is, are you weary and miserable? Do you feel that you need my aid and must have it? O then come to me, and you shall have it! And come to me now. Come just as you are, guilty, and defiled, and burdened, and wretched. I care nothing for the height of your guilt or the depth of your misery. I am a mighty Saviour, and such you shall find me. You shall wonder, and wonder soon, at the freeness and richness of my mercy, and you shall wonder too at the sweetness of my rest. You have

already made one discovery. A little while ago you heard of the bitterness of sin, and you did not believe it to be bitter, but you feel its bitterness now. There is yet another discovery you have to make, and one that will surprise you more—it is the peace which is to be found in me. No harbour so sweet to the storm-tossed mariner, as I am to the disquieted and troubled soul. No home so pleasant to the worn-out traveller, as I am to the wearied sinner. If there is happiness on earth, it is to be found at my feet. O come to my feet, that you may taste and enjoy it!”

And one word more. I speak to *you who know you are sinners, but who are not weary of sin*; you who have never yet felt sin a burden. Read this text. It is a very gracious one; but is it not also one that may well make your heart ache within you? Christ invites to him the weary and heavy-laden. It is to the oppressed and burdened soul he says, “Come unto me.” What does he say to you? In this text, nothing at all. And look through the whole Bible—there are words of comfort for every class of sufferers, many thousands of them; but for men such as you, the hard-hearted and careless, not one. It is a fearful sign of God’s displeasure against a man to leave him alone in such a state as this; with a mountain of guilt upon him, to allow him to feel no pain or pressure. May he leave you alone no longer! It may seem to you a strange prayer, but O may the living God afflict your hearts with a cutting sorrow! May he bruise and break them to pieces! O that you may feel, and feel soon, as alarmed as the Philippian jailor, when he said, “What must I do to be saved?” as broken-hearted as Peter, when he “went out and wept bitterly;” as oppressed in spirit as that poor publican who smote on his breast and said, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

SERMON XL.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

REST IN HEAVEN FOR THE TROUBLED.

2 THESSALONIANS I. 6, 7.—“It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven.”

WE have here a troubled Christian speaking to other Christians in trouble. He is trying to comfort them. May the God of all consolation grant that what he says to them to comfort them, may now comfort some of you!

There are three particulars for us to consider in the text—first, the term applied in it to our Lord’s coming; then, the different portions he will give to different persons when he comes; and then, his righteousness in so doing.

I. Our Lord’s coming, you observe, is called here *a revealing of him*; “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven.” And this is not a merely accidental use of the word, for we find it applied in the same way in other places; “Waiting for the coming,” or, as it is in the margin of our Bibles, “for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Again; “Be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Now to reveal is to uncover any thing that has before been hidden. It is to manifest it or make it visible. And this may be done in two ways—either spiritually or outwardly; to the eye of the mind or to the bodily eye.

In the former of these ways, Christ is already revealed to us in his gospel. It makes him known. Wherever it is preached, he may be said to be spiritually manifested. The Galatians had never seen him in any other manner, and yet they were told

that "Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth before their eyes, crucified among them."

And he has been revealed also in our world outwardly. Men with their bodily eyes have seen him. But then this was a very partial discovery of him. Few in the world saw him, and those few saw of him very little. He was here half disguised, with a veil thrown over him. But when he comes the second time, he will come without any disguise or veil. He will appear among us just as he appears at this moment to the angels who are at this moment gazing on him. We shall have a full manifestation of him, and a clear and open one. Nothing will intervene between him and us to obstruct our sight of him. He will sit on his throne before us in unclouded, infinite majesty. "When he shall appear, we shall see him as he is."

And this manifestation of him will be made to all the earth. When he came before, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judæa only saw him; but now all mankind will see him. "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him." His friends shall see him; his enemies shall see him. The living shall see him; the dead shall rise up out of their graves, and behold him. You and I, brethren, shall see him. We must all see him whether we will or not. "Every eye shall see him," yea, the eyes of those who least wish to see him—"they also which pierced him."

Am I prepared then for that great sight on which these eyes of mine will one day rest? My God now sees me, but the hour is coming when I in my flesh must see him. Can I bear the sight? "Who," asked a prophet of old, "may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?" Lord, shew me thy mercy, that I may abide. Grant me thy salvation, uphold me, that I may stand.

II. Let us look now at *the different portions our Lord will give to different persons when he comes*. Two classes of persons are mentioned in the text—men who trouble others, and those who are troubled by them. To each of these classes is to be given a different portion.

Look at *the troublers and their portion*.

Wherever God has a people to serve him, it matters not whether the country be called a heathen or a Christian one, there are sure to be such men as these. It ever has been so

and, till the kingdoms of this world become "the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ," it ever will be. Sometimes God visits these men with his displeasure here, just often enough to shew that he marks well what they are doing and is displeased with them; but generally he seems to let them alone. The hour for them to receive "the due reward of their deeds," is not yet come. That reward is not yet full. It will be measured out to them in fearful abundance, when the heavens are opened and the Son of Man is revealed.

It is called in the text "tribulation." Now tribulation is affliction, suffering. Of this we all know something; a few of us think we know of it almost as much as can be known; but what is the deepest sorrow that any of us have ever felt? No more to be compared with this tribulation, than the darkness of a summer cloud with a wintry midnight. There is no measuring of it. There is no conceiving of it. The most wretched man that lives, in his most wretched hours, can hardly form a notion of it. It is sorrow without any mixture of comfort or alleviation, and sorrow of the acutest and bitterest kind. It is "anguish," says Paul. It is "weeping," says Christ, "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

And, observe, it is called here a recompence; "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." They are not only to be visited with suffering, but that suffering is to come upon them as the consequence of their unkindness towards God's people. Their unkindness, it is intimated, will increase their everlasting misery. Wretched they would have been, even if they had let this people alone; their other great sins would have made them so; but they shall be more wretched because they would not let them alone.

How little do some of us think of this solemn truth! We hear "the hard speeches" of the ungodly, and we think of them as little more than the breakings forth of prejudice, or ill humour, or harmless pleasantry; but "There is something," says the Bible concerning every one of them, "that will never be forgotten. It has entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. There is a recompence for it to the righteous who suffer by it, a recompence of blessing; and there is a recompence too for that thoughtless man who utters it, a recompence of tribulation." "He shall hear of it again," says the Lord Jesus, "when I am revealed."

And how this truth magnifies the love that Christ bears to us ! It makes us feel that we have yet to learn what that love is. With a burning world underneath his feet, and a universe falling into ruin around him, he will come down from heaven as our avenger, grounding his proceedings as the great Judge of all on the conduct of men towards us, as well as towards himself. The whole universe he will force to understand in that hour what he meant when he said to his Israel, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye."

But look at *the portion of the troubled*.

We must not at once think that we are in the number of these men, because the world ill treats us. The world frequently torments its own followers, as well as the followers of the Lord. The apostle is addressing those and those only, who are troubled for Christ's sake. He speaks of them, in the third verse, as men of great faith and abounding charity ; and again in the fourth verse, as enduring all their persecutions and tribulations with a patience and faith that caused him to glory in them among the churches of God. Now though we are not to say that we have nothing to do with this text, because we are men of weak faith and are sometimes impatient and angry under injuries, yet it is very clear we have nothing to do with it unless it is for our Master's sake, or, as the fifth verse expresses it, "for the kingdom of God," that we are injured.

The blessing the apostle promises us, is "rest," and that a rest with himself.

It is "rest." I need not say, brethren, here is the very thing for which some of us most long. We are often grieved with ourselves that we do so earnestly long for it. But mark the compassion of the Lord towards us. He lets us see that the holy Paul longed for this thing as much as we ; and more—that he regarded it as a thing to be lawfully desired and longed for. Here he is, trying to comfort his fellow-sufferers with the prospect of it. "I know your hearts," the Lord says to us by him. "I see how oppressed you are, and how weary and fainting. You ask me for patience and strength in your sufferings, and you shall have patience and strength ; but I understand well for what your hearts are aching. You wish the battle over, and fear no anger from me because you do so. You may wish it over. The comfort I now offer you, is the assurance that it will soon be over. There remaineth a rest for my people, and

that rest you shall have—rest from the troubling of the wicked, rest from evil hands and evil tongues, rest from conflict and labour, rest from sin, a quiet and unbroken and everlasting rest in my peaceful home.”

O the tenderness of our exalted Lord ! This one word “rest” may shew us its greatness. Were we in heaven, we should never call heaven by this name. It is a world of ceaseless employment. They, we are told, who dwell in it, “rest not day nor night.” Their powers are every moment called into exercise, and not that poor, crippled exercise of which we are capable; there is a wonderful energy in them. They are able to bring all the power they possess into action, and to sustain it in action, and this without effort or weariness. And herein lies much of their happiness. It is not happiness to lie senseless like a clod of earth or a stone. We must think and feel to be happy; and they in heaven are happier than we, for this among other reasons, because they think and feel more. But the Lord Jesus passes over all this and more than this. His people on earth are troubled, wearied, and fainting; and losing sight of all the splendours and joys of his kingdom, as well as its employments, he places it before us in a character we can understand. It is no longer joy; it is no longer glory, or honour, or immortality; it is not a temple wherein he is every moment praised; it is a rest, he says; he speaks of it as a world of quietness and repose.

Some of you perhaps can hardly understand this. You want to be in heaven, you say, that you may serve God in heaven without those miserable interruptions and hindrances you experience here. The idea of rest in heaven seems to you a pause in its happiness. This is well, brethren; you are feeling as Christian men ought always to feel; but this will not last for ever. There may come a time when you will long for rest as intensely as ever wearied traveller longed for his home. No words in your Bible may be more often in your minds than these, “There remaineth a rest;” no declaration in the Bible may correspond more with your feelings than this, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours.”

This rest, the apostle says further, is rest with him and others like him—“rest with us.” Perhaps he had in his mind Silvanus and Timotheus whom he had just mentioned, and in whose

name, as well as his own, he was writing. But be this as it may, it is clear from his words, that when the Lord gives us rest, it will be a rest of the same kind that he gives to his highest saints, his apostles and martyrs, and a rest which we shall enjoy with them. He has not two heavens for his redeemed, nor has he placed any division or barrier to separate them in the one heaven he has prepared. Where Paul is, there shall we be, and partake of the same blessedness. We shall be with "the general assembly and church of the first-born" in heaven. We shall "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God."

"I heed not this," some one may say. "All I want is, to be with my Lord; and once with him, I ask no more." But the man who really loves Christ, loves also the people of Christ. He must do so. "Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." And those whom we much love, we wish to be with. It will follow then, that though the presence of the Lord Jesus and the enjoyment of him will constitute the chief blessedness of heaven, this blessedness will be sweetened and increased by our sharing it with others. We shall be happier men as we look around us and perceive that we are in a happy world. Even now it is pleasant to see and know those who love our Lord; the soul goes out to them, and clings to them with feelings of no common delight; but how much more pleasant will it be to see and know them where all is love, and delight, and joy? Paul evidently could enter into this feeling. He would never have said here "rest with us," if he could not. It rejoiced him to think that his poor, troubled converts at Thessalonica would be with him in glory; and he speaks as though he thought that the prospect of being with him there would rejoice them. "Heed not," he seems to say, "your tribulations, and I will try not to heed mine. We must now bear them apart; but there is a rest remaining for you and me, the same rest, and we shall enjoy it together. We have the same God, the same Saviour; he gives us now the same sufferings; but yet a little while, we shall rejoice together before him in the same heaven. We shall stand side by side before the throne." That man, brethren, has not a Christian heart, who cannot understand this. I might almost say, he has no heart at all. The very heathen when they thought of happiness in another life, thought at the same time of the good and the great

with whom they hoped to enjoy it. One of the most beautiful passages their eloquent pens ever wrote, is that wherein one of them breathes forth the longings of his soul to be with the sages and philosophers who were gone before him. And shall we deem it nothing to be with those saints of the living God, who are gone before us into his presence—the righteous Abel, the honoured Abraham, the faithful Moses, the once heart-broken but now exulting David, the heroic Daniel, the gentle and seraphic John, the glowing Peter, the noble Paul, Stephen with his martyr's crown, and the martyrs and fathers of the churches with their crowns of life, and our own fathers and brethren and friends, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; and to be with all these, not as mere spectators of their glory, but as the sharers of it; to be welcomed by them, to mix with them, to feel ourselves valued and loved among them, to be one of them? O brethren, there is more blessedness awaiting us in heaven than we have ever yet conceived of. Besides the one great fountain, "that river of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," there will flow into our soul stream after stream, of which many of us have not now a thought.

Such are the different portions the Lord Jesus will give to different men at his coming—tribulation to the troublers of his people, rest, and rest with his saints, to those troubled people themselves.

III. We have now to notice *his righteousness in so doing*; "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest."

When Christ came down to our world the first time, he came as a Saviour. He accordingly displayed in his coming chiefly the love and mercy of Jehovah. But when he is seen coming again from heaven, he will come as a Judge; and what we look for in a Judge, is not love, but equity and righteousness. Mercy he may have and ought to have, but he does not come on an errand of mercy; his main business is to dispense justice. Hence the day of our Lord's coming is called the great day of "judgment." "God," it is said, "will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained." The day when he will be revealed, is said again to be "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The Son of

God and the justice of God will be revealed together. His justice is now very much a matter of faith. It is, like our Lord himself, out of our sight. Some indications there are of it in the world, but there is not a consistent and open display of it in the world. The godly suffer and the ungodly prosper. But when "the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised," there will be an end for ever to all this seeming confusion. "Then," says the prophet, "shall ye discern between the righteous and the wicked." "The mystery of God" shall be finished. He will reveal his justice and equity so clearly, yea, so brightly, that not a creature in the universe shall suspect him of doing wrong. Heaven, earth, and hell, angels, devils, and men, shall all see together that he is righteous. Every cavilling tongue shall be stopped; every murmur shall be silenced; every feeling of wonder shall be gone. An angel shall say, and no one shall dispute his words, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus."

Now to bring this about, there must be justice, and evident justice, in the different portions the Lord will allot to different men. Their destinies must be suited to their character and conduct, and plainly so; it must be seen that every man has received just what he ought.

Turn now to the text. See standing there before the great Judge of all, two separate companies of men. Here, on the one side, are those who bore for years, and willingly bore, hatred and reproach for his name's sake; and there, on the other side, are those who reproached and hated them because they loved his name. Without looking any farther, we see at once the force of the apostle's words. That righteous Judge must recompense tribulation to those injurious men. They have troubled his people, and it is but their desert that they should be troubled now in their turn. They dealt in evil; evil therefore shall be rendered unto them.

And shall not that harassed people on the other side, at last find rest? True, they merit it not; for notwithstanding all they have borne for Christ, what are they? A company of miserable sinners, snatched by amazing mercy as brands from the burning, and deserving to be cast into that burning again. Remembering what they are, we should have expected the apostle to say, "It is a merciful thing with God to give them

rest ; it is a wonderfully gracious thing : ” and in other places he does say this ; he often says it ; it is the one great theme on which his thankful tongue delighted to dwell. But here for once he enters into his blessed Master’s feelings ; he speaks his Master’s language. He, on the throne of his glory, says nothing of his people’s sins ; he seems to think only of his people’s services : and Paul here, looking on that assembly of once persecuted saints, loses sight of every thing but their sufferings, and the patience with which they bore them, and says, “ It is a righteous thing with God to give them rest. ” Nay, humble as he was, he applies language of this kind to himself. “ I have fought a good fight, ” he says, “ I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day. ”

But we may take another view of his words.

We have naturally as sinners no claim on God’s justice. We cannot have. If he bestows on us any blessing, that blessing must come to us from his own free bounty and overflowing goodness. But though we deserve nothing good of him, he has graciously pledged himself in Christ Jesus to give us much—the pardon of our sins in this life and a victory over them ; comfort under our troubles and strength to bear them ; and this life ended, there is an eternity of rest awaiting us, he says, in his own heavenly kingdom. The Bible is full of such promises as these, and they will serve to explain the language employed in this text.

What the grace of God leads him to promise, the justice of God will lead him to perform. The gift may be undeserved, but if he says to the sinners who are looking to him for it, “ You shall have it, ” his righteousness will constrain him to bestow it. Grace, under such circumstances, is grace still, but it has been a long promised and long looked for grace, and now when at last it comes, it comes with the stamp of equity and justice on it. The unworthiness of the sinners who receive it, has nothing to do in the matter. They were as unworthy when the promise was given. The justice of the transaction rests elsewhere. It is a righteous thing with God to give rest to his troubled people, for he has bound himself by his sacred word, by his covenant and oath, to give it them.

What a blessed truth then is here ! Once pardoned and accepted in Christ Jesus, that very attribute of Jehovah, of which

we were the most afraid, is on our side. It ensures our salvation. Our salvation will manifest it. There is a day coming when justice and mercy shall triumph openly together. The Lord "shall come to be glorified in his saints," not only for the display he has made in them of the riches of his grace, but for the monuments he has made them of his righteousness and truth.

Are any of you then the troubled servants of Christ? Am I speaking to any who, like these Thessalonians, are experiencing hard usage in the world for the kingdom of God's sake? Let me call on you to bear this usage as these men bore it, with "patience and faith."

With "patience." Sooner or later, brethren, you will need this. Sometimes we can almost smile at the world's petty hatred. It is as easy to bear as the lightest feather. But not so always. The mind after a time becomes fretted and wearied with that which at first it despised, and the feather is now a burden. Then comes Satan and says, "Bear this no longer." Then speaks out our own impatient heart, and says, "Why should I bear it?" But then also is the time to turn to such a text as this, and learn that this tribulation and persecution must be endured. To attempt to get away from it is useless. It is a part of our promised portion. The same covenant that secures heaven to us at the end, secures to us this tribulation in the way to it. If we trust to Jehovah's righteousness for the one, we must expect to receive from his faithfulness the other.

And these trials must be borne with "faith." They cannot be borne without it. You have the sure promise of God, if you are his, that he will comfort you under them, sanctify you by them, carry you through them, and in the end recompense you for them. All you want is a stedfast belief in these promises, and a looking forward to their full accomplishment. The revelation of Jesus Christ from heaven, the wonderful recompence that will then be yours, the mercy, and truth, and never failing righteousness, which secure this recompence to you—there lies your real comfort, brethren. Look for it there. Do not seek consolation under ill-treatment from one part of the world, by seeking kinder treatment from some other part of it. Live above this poor world altogether. Poor indeed it is. Pity it, bear with it, pray for it, help it if you can—your Master died

for it—but sit loose to it, hold it cheap. Do as these Thessalonians did—“turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

SERMON XLI.

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TRUE RELIGION EXEMPLIFIED IN MARY.

ST. LUKE X. 41, 42.—“Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.”

THERE can be no doubt as to what our Lord means by the “one thing” and the “good part” he here commends. They are both of them true religion. And the use I now purpose to make of this scripture is, to hold it up to you as a standard of true religion. It does more, observe, than praise this blessed thing; it partially describes it. It tells us what it is, and thus enables us to judge whether there is any of it to be found in our own hearts. And it goes farther; it distinguishes between a high degree of this religion and a low degree of it. It not only settles the question, whether we are real Christians; it lets us know whereabouts every real believer among us is standing in Christ’s school. Is the coin genuine or a counterfeit? That is one point it determines, and then, supposing it to be genuine, this is the other—what is the quality of the gold the coin contains? has it much dross in it or little? God grant that every one of us may be willing to bring his religion to this test.

I. We will begin with the latter of these two questions, and look at this scripture as *distinguishing between Christian and Christian*.

Both these sisters were undoubtedly sincere followers of our Lord; they were both converted, holy women. It is expressly said in another place that Jesus loved both, and we find both of them acting on several occasions as though they really believed in and loved him. But yet we see here a great difference between them, and such a difference as natural disposition will not of itself account for. The main source of it lay elsewhere—one was high in spiritual attainments, the other was a learner in the same school, but as yet had learnt much less in it. And mark the kindness of God in setting before us in his word such different characters. Every one of his people, from the highest in his church to the lowest, may find here a counterpart to himself, and thus meet warnings and encouragements suited exactly to his own case.

We may discover in Mary two marks of a highly spiritual mind.

Notice, first, *her composure*; her composure, I mean, as to worldly things.

It seems from the thirty-eighth verse, that the Saviour came to Bethany at this time an unexpected guest. Martha is consequently thrown off her guard. In her anxiety to provide a suitable entertainment for him, she loses first her serenity and then her temper. She “was cumbered,” we are told, that is, hurried and distressed, “about much serving.” While in this frame of mind, seeing Mary unemployed, she feels angry, rudely breaks in on our Lord’s discourse with her, and even rebukes him for detaining her; “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?”

But look now at Mary. One short sentence is all the evangelist has for her, but we scarcely want more. It places her before us all tranquillity. She “sat,” he says, “at Jesus’ feet,” happy indeed to be near those blessed feet, and as long as she is there, without an anxiety or a care. But how was this? Did she love the Lord Jesus less than Martha? Not so; she loved him more. We must account for her quietness in another way—she was less earthly-minded than Martha. One thing had laid a firmer hold of her mind, and that one thing had weakened the power of all other things over it. Her loftier piety made the difference.

I do not mean that every quiet person is more holy than his less placid neighbour. There is a constitutional quietness, and there is a quietness also that proceeds from a want of feeling. What I mean is, that true piety is in its nature a tranquillizing thing, and will ever act agreeably to its nature—it will make every man tranquil as to worldly things in proportion as he comes under its influence. For what is it? It is a dethroning of the things of time and sense in the heart; it is a stripping them of their assumed importance; it is a placing of something else far above them; it is a transfer of the soul's best affections from the world to God. Now this cannot be wrought in a man, and yet leave him as much as ever at the world's mercy. He must, in the very nature of things, care less about it, and be less affected by it. The state of his mind towards it will become a test and measure of his piety. Our own experience tells us this. It is amazing how easily we can let the world take its course, when for a time we are walking closely with God; it is amazing too how easily the world can cumber and disquiet us, when God is forgotten. Away from Christ, we lose our composure and temper at every trifle; in Mary's place, at our Master's feet, our heart is fixed; nothing moves us; we wonder that any one earthly thing should have ever cost us a care.

Observe in Mary another thing—an earnest desire of spiritual instruction. "She sat," we read, "at Jesus' feet." But love for him, we say, might have placed her there. She wished perhaps to be near her holy guest and enjoy his society. "No," says the evangelist, "she sat at his feet, and heard his word." She placed herself near him, he seems to intimate, that she might hear his word. Warm-hearted as she was, she forgets or half forgets the friend in the teacher. There she sits, thirsting for spiritual knowledge, and drinking in the heavenly doctrine falling from his lips, as though it were health and joy to her. Martha, on the contrary, had no such feelings. She appears to have turned aside altogether from our Lord's instructions at this time, and to have done so almost without regret. She let the stream of heavenly wisdom flow by her untasted and unheeded.

And indifference like hers is by no means uncommon now. There are some really Christian persons, who manifest a frame of mind exactly similar to it. They know very little of divine things, and seem almost indifferent whether or not they ever know more. They hear sermons, and read their Bibles, and

talk with their godly friends; but they are never anxious, as far as we can see, to gain much instruction from them. If they gain any, it enters their minds unsought. We dare not say of these men, that they have no true religion. We should say so, if we looked at this feature of their character alone; but their blameless lives, their good conversation, their fear of sin, their readiness for every good word and work, prove the reverse. The wonder is how they can know what they really do know of a glorious Saviour, and not wish to know more; how they can know so little of him, and yet be so content. We can solve the difficulty in only one way—they too are careful and troubled about many things; they too are cumbered about much serving. The world is not on the throne of their hearts, but nevertheless the world is in their hearts, and a great deal of the world. It crowds their hearts. It chokes them up. There is not room in them for much spiritual knowledge. And this clearly proves their religious character to be low. It must do so. The great truths of the gospel are so glorious, that a heaven-born mind, if at liberty, must be delighted with them. It cannot learn a little of them without thirsting to learn more. There is no satisfying such a mind. In some earthly sciences, the mind does become satisfied. It makes the thing out, it sees that it has learnt all that can be learnt of the matter; therefore it reposes. Or it grows weary with its researches. It discovers that it is aiming at that which is not worth the labour of acquiring, and consequently it ceases from its toil before it has acquired it. But not so in divine things. Ages and ages of study would not carry us to the bottom of them; eternity will leave in them depths of wisdom and love unexplored. Abraham and Paul in heaven are yet learners; they are still mere babes in knowledge; and so is the highest archangel, that has been the longest there. And as for growing weary of studying these things, we never can do so, unless other things draw us off. The more we learn of them, the more we shall wish to learn. Look at the angels. We just glance at the gospel; they, we are told, “desire to look into it;” they bend down, as the original word imports, to examine it. It is the same word that describes the anxious looking of John and Mary, on the morning of the resurrection, into their Master’s tomb. They regard it with the deepest interest, and the most intense attention. And look at Paul. Who on earth ever knew more of Christ than he? And yet

what does he say? He speaks as though he knew nothing; he is willing to give up the whole world that he may know more. "Yea doubtless I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." And he does not end here. "I have suffered," he adds, "the loss of all things," and with regret? "No," he says again, "I do not care a whit for the loss of them. I do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in him, and"—one thing more—"that I may know him."

I am not pleading, brethren, for a merely barren knowledge of the gospel. No right knowledge of it can be barren. Nor am I urging you to neglect your daily occupations, and run up and down to hear sermons, or shut yourselves up and read books. All that I am contending for is, that a desire of spiritual knowledge is a test of character; that those among us, who desire it the most, are the holiest. And all that I would urge on you is, that you would not throw away on the world all the understanding God has given you. It is mournful that a dying sinner should be a thoughtful, enquiring man among his goods and merchandize, his sheep and cattle, shrewd and penetrating, taking nothing on trust, and sifting to the bottom every thing that concerns him; and yet the same man put his mind to sleep as he opens his Bible or enters a church. Worldliness of heart only can account for this. "Much serving" leads us away from our great Teacher. Our low degree of knowledge is the result of a low degree of piety. We are not growing in grace, therefore we are not growing, nor desiring to grow, "in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The apostle, you observe, couples these two things together, knowledge and grace, and never can they be put asunder. They are as closely connected as the day and the light.

We may now leave this part of our subject. Let me however first add one remark. If any of you should think I have laid too much stress on the two things I have noticed in Mary, and made too much of them, mark this—they are the exact points in which at this moment she most visibly resembled our Lord. He was quiet in a house of bustle; so was Mary. He made much of heavenly wisdom, for he began to teach it as soon as he entered that house; she made much of it also, for she sat down at his feet to learn it. You know what follows—the more we resemble Christ, the holier we are; the more like him, the nearer we are to him.

II. We are now to view this scripture as *distinguishing between the real Christian and all other men.*

1. It tells us that, with the real Christian, *religion is a needful thing*; it is known and felt to be such. "One thing is needful," says Christ, and he so says it, observe, as to imply that Mary regarded it in this light; that it was her estimate of it, as well as his own.

When we say in common discourse, that one thing is necessary for any purpose, we do not mean that nothing else is at all necessary. All we mean is, that what we are speaking of is pre-eminently necessary, or necessary above all other things. And so we may understand our Lord in this passage. He means by it that true religion is so needful, that in comparison with it, nothing else deserves to be called needful or thought so. It is of paramount importance. It is our one great want.

We may need other things, but our need of them is in some way limited.

Some of them are necessary for our comfort only; we cannot do well without them. Such are light, and raiment, and a home. But we cannot do at all without this. Our safety depends on it. Nothing can supply its place. It is as needful for us as food or air.

Some things too are only occasionally needful, needful for certain purposes and for a certain time; such as medicine in sickness, or a staff in weakness. The grace of God is always and universally needful. It is needful in all things at all times. What we call the necessities of life, we cannot want long, for life will not last long, we shall soon be in a world where there is no place for them; but those things in which true religion consists, we shall always want, to-day and to-morrow, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in time and in eternity. They are needful now amid the changes of life, they will be needful to us soon in the sinkings and agonies of death, needful in the world of spirits, needful at the bar of God, needful millions of ages hence, and so needful, that we are undone if we do not possess them. Well then may our Lord call this needful thing the one thing needful. Well may he lose sight of every other necessary thing in contemplating this.

And the real Christian is aware of all this. There is a correspondence between his judgment and feelings, and this fact. He sees and he feels godliness to be needful for him, and press-

ingly needful. He desires it, he seeks it like one who knows that he cannot do without it; and when he has found it, he holds it fast, like one who knows that there is nothing else between him and destruction, just as a shipwrecked mariner clings to his plank. "One thing is needful," says Christ. "One thing I desire," answers the believer; "one thing I do."

Now, brethren, is yours a religion of this kind? I do not ask now whether you have much of it or little. I do not ask even what it is. The question is, be it what it may, has it this feature of sound piety—do you feel it to be absolutely necessary for you? Do you find that you need it at all times and in all things? Is it in your estimation of supreme importance?

We know what most men think on this point. "Religion," they say, "is very well in its place. It is right on the sabbath. It is a good thing in trouble or sickness, and a better thing in death." And then they lay it aside till death, or trouble, or sickness, comes. But have you found out that you cannot do so? Do you feel that you must make it an every day concern? yea, an hourly concern? that you must take it with you into your business, or you will go wrong there? into your pleasures, or you will turn them into sins? into your families, or mischief will spring up in them? into company, or you will come out of it shamed and grieved? into solitude, into your chamber and to your bed, or you will sin even there and suffer? If so, if your religion is felt to be thus needful for you, then your judgment on this point agrees with Christ's, and the probability is that you are Christ's and that your religion is of God. But if not, if among the many things you are careful and troubled about, this occupies no place; if it seems to you the one thing superfluous or needless, rather than the one thing needful; then your view of this matter differs totally from our Lord's; and you know the conclusion—I would not state it harshly, but I cannot state it too plainly—you are none of his; you are no more Christians than you are angels. If any man be in Christ Jesus, he has the spirit and the mind of Christ Jesus; he views things as Christ views them; he thinks and feels with him. If we think and feel altogether differently, it is as plain as any fact can be plain, that there is no communion between us and him.

2. But further—our Lord tells us here that true religion is *something that is chosen*; it is a matter of deliberate and serious choice. "Mary," he says, "hath chosen that good part

which shall not be taken away from her." It has not been forced on her; it has not come to her by chance; she has taken it up. Of the many things within her reach, she has made choice of this one thing, the one thing needful.

Many owe their religion solely to what we may call accident. They adopt the creed of their ancestors or neighbours without examination or thought. And consequently what little semblance of religion they have, must be ascribed to the place of their birth, or the custom of their country, or the habits of their friends. Choice has nothing to do with it. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain," said the woman of Samaria. "Yes," answered Christ, "but neither they nor you have known what you have been worshipping here. Ye worship ye know not what." And the same may be said of half the professing Christians we meet with. "Our fathers believed this and did that, and therefore we do and believe the same"—that is the sum of their religion.

Others again are religious by constraint. A slavish fear compels them. Tell them that godliness is a needful thing, they acknowledge it to be such; but, at the same time, they wish it were not so needful. They do not like it. They would be glad to do without it, if they could. But they dare not altogether give it up. Conscience would disquiet them if they did. And hence they go on with a round of wearisome duties. Herod-like, they hear many things and do many things. But there is no real godliness in all this. There is nothing of that gospel-spirit the apostle speaks of, "not the spirit of fear, but of power and of love." In this case again there is no choice. God has the conscience but not the heart. These men are not won, not gained; they are only restrained. They are unwilling captives in fetters they hate.

And take another class of persons, found chiefly among the young. They are religious from mere feeling. Their imaginations have been in some way wrought on, and their sympathies called out. Like the stony ground hearers, they receive the word and with gladness. But here also the case is the same—there has been no deliberation, no solemn and deep searchings of heart, no serious choosing. Religion has not yet taken any root in the soul; it is merely lying on the surface. Something must yet be done within them, or, like their counterparts in the parable, these green and flourishing plants will wither away.

The religion that saves the soul, lays hold of the soul before it saves it, and the whole soul. It commends itself to the judgment, it wins the affections, it captivates the heart. It is first seen to be a necessary thing, then felt to be a blessed thing, then determined on as a thing which above all others shall be chosen, and followed, and held fast. The taking of it up is a personal transaction between a man and his God. It is our own act and deed. It is the soul's solemn and deliberate choice of God for its portion. It is for a man to say coolly and firmly, if on such a subject a man can be cool, "I have reckoned the cost, and this is my decision—I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. I will lose all things, rather than lose him. By his help, I will give him my heart; and I pray him to do what he will with that heart, to break, pierce, wound it as he may, so that he keeps it his. O that he would make it entirely and for ever his own!" If this is your language, brethren, there is no doubt as to your character. It may be as full of infirmity and imperfection as you suppose it, but you, like Mary, have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from you. And what has led you to choose it? Your friends and ministers, your mercies and afflictions? No; they could no more turn such a heart as yours from the world to God, than so many straws thrown into a river could alter its course. The Lord himself has made you "a willing people in the day of his power." You have chosen him, because he first, in his abounding mercy, chose you. And a happy choice is yours. Look again at the text. It says to you plainly at the end of it, *Rejoice, and rejoice greatly, in the choice you have made.* It is a good part, it says, that you have chosen; and more than that—a durable and lasting one; it is something you cannot lose.

Now this is more than can be said of any thing else we possess. Where, when a few more years are gone, will be all other things which are ours? Where will those very things be, about which we are now at times so careful and troubled? They too will be gone; gone with the years that have given them birth, and gone to us as entirely. Houses and lands, business, riches, pleasures, friendships, all that now occupies, and burdens, and fevers us—it will all be to us soon no more than as "a dream when one awaketh." There will appear to us no more reality in it. We shall have no more to do with it than with things

that are not. O the strange breach that is about to be made between the world and us! how wide and fathomless! It will be so complete, that even the most holy mind cannot always contemplate it unmoved. There will not be a fragment of the world left to us. And a mere formal, outside religion will go the same way. It is born of the earth, and when we leave the earth, we shall see no more of it. Death will strip it off us. We shall go into eternity bare and naked as the heathen. But not so with true religion; not so with the grace of God in the soul; not so with that one thing which the soul feels to be the one thing needful for it, and chooses as such. It shall not be taken away from us. The God who bestows it, will not take it away, for it is one of his gifts which are without repentance. Man indeed would take it away if he could, and so would Satan; but they cannot; it is a treasure that he who is stronger than man or Satan, will ever watch over and preserve. As for the desolations of death, they can no more harm or touch it, than they can touch the soul itself or harm God. It goes along with the soul into another world, and becomes to it the one thing needful, the good part there. Hear our Lord. He compares his grace to water, and says of it that it shall be in the soul "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And hear St. Paul. He too says of this work within us, that it is both a "good work" and a lasting one. "He who hath begun it," he tells us, "will perform" or complete "it until the day of Christ." O if it be but begun in us, how can we rejoice enough in it? It is dangerous, I know, to rejoice in any thing short of Christ himself. We may allow even his best and holiest gifts to draw away our dependence from him. But he can save us from this danger. While he is our chief joy, the grace that comes from him, may surely be our next; for what is it? It is heaven begun in us; it is the seed of our future holiness and our endless joy.

And this is the way to rise above our worldly cares and worldly minds—to look at something higher and better than worldly things, and to feel it to be our own. The grace of Christ, free and abounding; the love of Christ, tender, vast, and eternal; the Spirit of Christ, quickening, purifying, and elevating; the blood of Christ, cleansing the soul and making it white as snow; the righteousness of Christ, covering the soul and, like a beauteous robe, adorning it; the kingdom of Christ,

glorious, and holy, and everlasting; the presence of Christ, with its fulness of unfading joy—to have these before us, and to say of these, “I through grace have chosen them, and they are mine”—here, brethren, is the best cure we can have for an earthly heart; here is something that can rid the cumbered and weary soul of all its loads. Let us then once more take up our beautiful collect for this day, and say, “Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

SERMON XLII.

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

ST. JOHN XI. 43, 44.—“And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth; and he that was dead, came forth.”

SOME of you may occasionally have seen a painting or work of art so exquisitely beautiful that you have been almost afraid to touch it. You have felt that nothing could improve it, and that a rash hand might very easily injure or disfigure it. Like this is the feeling with which we regard some of the historical parts of God's holy word. We ministers shrink from preaching to you from them, lest we should mar their beauty in our vain endeavours to set it forth, and weaken their effect while attempting to increase it. The history before us is of this kind. I will make no effort to give new force to it, or heighten your admiration of it. All I will aim at is to set before you as plainly as I can, a part of the instruction it affords.

I. The first remark I would draw from it, is this very common one—*we should always be prepared for trouble*. It may enter our houses and our hearts also when we least expect it.

The chapter presents to us, at the opening of it, a scene of distress where we certainly should not have looked for one. "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus," we are told; loved them exceedingly, so as to draw attention to the love he bore them; and besides this, their house was as a home to him whenever he came to Jerusalem; he often retired to it from the turmoil of the city for quiet and refreshment. If ever then, we should have said, there was a house secure from trouble, it is this—the abode of those whom Christ tenderly loves, and the place where he himself finds repose. But there is sickness gone into this house, and alarm. It is become a scene of disquietude, even while these beloved people are in it, and the blessed Jesus is still on the earth, and needing more than ever a place of repose in it.

We know that Christ's love for us will not save us from trouble. "As many as I love," he says, "I rebuke and chasten." We see here that Christ's seeming need of us will not save us from trouble. He will cut down our comforts, our health or quiet or any thing that is ours, even at the time when he is condescending to employ them in his service; laying his axe apparently at the root of our usefulness to him, while he is wounding and stripping us by it.

II. *The design of God in our troubles often lies deeper than we can at first see.*

"Master, who did sin," said the short-sighted disciples to their Lord on another occasion, "this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents," Jesus answered, "but that the works of God should be made manifest in him:" God has his own honour in view in that man's blindness. So here. What lessons, men might say, does this scene of distress in that once peaceful house teach us!—the instability of human happiness, the insecurity of even Christ's dearest friends from the strokes of sorrow, the mysteriousness of the ways of God. But what says Christ of this distressing scene? Not one word of all this. "This sickness," he says, "is for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

And this imparts almost a grandeur to our afflictions, brethren. I am thinking of myself only in this trouble, how to get relief from it, or support under it, or at the best some good for my soul from it; but the Lord has a deeper design—he is aiming at his own glory in it. It may, through his grace, benefit me; but it must, through his power, glorify him. Well then may I be content to be afflicted. I cannot do much for my Saviour's honour; I never could; but if by my sorrows, my sufferings, my infirmities, he can get honour to himself, happy sorrows, happy sufferings, blessed infirmities! Lord, lay them upon me many as thou wilt, and keep them on me long as thou pleasest.

III. Christ sometimes delays his help in our afflictions, though we seek it earnestly and in a way he approves.

When this sickness came upon Lazarus, our Lord was at a distance. He had lately been in Jerusalem, but the Jews had been more than usually incensed against him, and to escape their violence, he had gone for a season over the Jordan into the wilderness, perhaps about thirty miles away. Martha and Mary however send off a messenger to him, and words could not convey a more earnest or touching appeal to him, than the message he carries. "His sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." They say no more; they do not ask him to come to them; they throw themselves and their sick brother entirely on his love, feeling that this is enough—it will certainly bring him.

We are reminded here of a somewhat similar appeal a stranger had made to him some time before, the Roman centurion. "Lord," he says, "my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." He does not add to this, "Pray help him;" he seems to think that the mere making known to Christ of his need of help will bring help to him, that his servant's misery will of itself move Christ's mercy. And he thinks aright. "I will come and heal him," is at once the Saviour's merciful and lofty answer. But here what do we find? Not his mercy, the ordinary compassion of his nature, but his love is appealed to, and most affectingly appealed to, and by those very dear to him in behalf of one as dear; and yet he moves not. He really loved Lazarus; the evangelist takes care to tell us this; but in the very next sentence he tells us, "when he had heard that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place

where he was." There is a civil answer for his distressed sisters, but apparently an untrue one; kind words for them, but no assistance. We can easily conceive their wonder and disappointment, the sinking and sickening of their hearts, when their messenger returned.

And have you, brethren, never experienced any thing of this kind, I do not say from your fellow-men when you have sought their help, but from this very Jesus? If you have long known him and often tried him, you certainly have. He has left trouble upon you after you have implored him to remove it, and has kept, or seemed to keep, far away from you when you have besought him to draw near. And this has more than distressed, it has surprised and perplexed you. "There stands the promise," you say, "'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee'—we have called upon him, and he has not delivered us. We have cast ourselves on his mercy, nay on his love, for we have felt at times that he really loves us, but it has been all in vain: he heeds us not; our prayers all seem to fall to the ground unanswered and unnoticed." It is well, brethren, if in such seasons the Lord keeps our minds clear from some of the very darkest workings of suspicion and unbelief. But this history says to us, we must be quiet. The great Saviour is only dealing with us as he often deals with his friends, even with those he loves the most. The bread may be bitter, but it is the children's bread, and the very best our Father can now find for us. Prayers heard and at once granted are great encouragements to our faith; but our faith must be tried as well as encouraged. For the tree to strike its roots deep in the earth, it must have the wind and the storm, we say, as well as the sunshine, the wind and the storm that seem ready at times to tear it up; and for our faith to be the vigorous, strong faith of God's elect, the faith that most honours him, and that most humbles and sanctifies us, and falls in the best with his ways, carrying us triumphantly on amid the varied scenes through which he is leading us, it must have discouragements, delays, and denials, to try it. It must have its strength called out by such things as these, exercised by them, and so invigorated by them and increased.

IV. *Our situation in trouble sometimes becomes worse while we are applying to Christ for help in it, and not worse only, but in appearance hopeless.* Lazarus was sick only when the mes-

senger was sent off from his house, but while that messenger is telling Jesus of his sickness, or soon afterwards, he dies.

And this same thing had before happened to another of our Lord's petitioners. Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue, applies to him in behalf of a sick child, his only daughter. With all a father's earnestness he casts himself at his feet, and beseeches him to come with him to his house and heal her. Christ sets out with him, but as they are going, "there comes one to Jairus from his house, saying, Thy daughter is dead." The child dies, observe, while the father is by our Lord's side imploring him to save her.

And it is often thus with the praying people of God; often in their worldly circumstances, still oftener in their spiritual experience. We look to him for light, but, behold, darkness, thicker darkness. Our situation becomes worse while we are praying to him for relief, till at last it is, as we think, beyond relief, perfectly, irrecoverably hopeless. And God's purpose in afflicting us often requires that our afflictions should come to this. His design is to glorify himself in our deliverance, and to accomplish this design to the extent he purposes, he must bring us into an extremity before he appears for us. Our condition must seem desperate, that his power may be seen, and his pity and love be seen, as he delivers us out of it. He might have gone at once to Lazarus, have found him alive, and healed him. The act would have been a kind and a great one; it would have manifested his kindness and greatness, just as many other of his miracles had done. But he loved Lazarus; he had singled him out as a special object wherein to shew forth his greatness; and therefore he will not go and heal him; he keeps away from him when he is sick; lets him die, and be buried, and lie four days in his grave. To accomplish his glorious design in him, he places him, not only out of the reach of man's help, but apparently beyond the reach of his own. He had never yet helped any one in such a case as this. Twice before he had raised the dead, but he had never before called a buried man from his tomb.

Is there any one here who is saying, "I see not how help can reach me?" So much the better, this history says to you; the Lord can now magnify himself in stretching forth his helping arm to you. Do you say again, "My case is beyond relief?" So much the better, this history answers again; the Lord can now glorify his power in bringing you relief when none other

can. It begins to be really well with a praying man, when every earthly refuge fails him, when every prop underneath him breaks, when the very ground beneath his feet seems to be giving way. Then a glorious God delights to come in, and shew himself strong in his behalf. It is at "the evening time" that he promises us light; it is "when the poor and needy seek water and there is none," that he engages to open rivers and fountains for them, and make the desert a pool.

V. *We always have the notice and sympathy of Christ in our afflictions, even though he delay long to help us under them.*

It is easy to see from our Lord's discourse with his disciples, where his heart was while he was lingering these two days in the wilderness. It was at Bethany, in the chamber of Lazarus and with his suffering sisters. He doubtless felt it a grief to him to keep away from Bethany; to have the power of alleviating and removing the misery of those he so much loved, and yet not to use it. And we can easily conceive that one of the peculiar sources of his suffering on earth was this very thing. We feel pain when we see misery, because we long to relieve it and cannot; he must have felt a deeper pain when he saw it—he could relieve it and must not; the glory of God required that he should be constantly restraining his compassion and holding back his arm.

He comes at last to Bethany, and were it not for the wonderful miracle with which this history ends, we should say that his great design in coming here is to manifest to his church his amazing sympathy. Never before had he so manifested it; no where else in the whole book of God is there such a discovery made to us of its real character.

It is *patient* sympathy that we find in him here; forbearing; not crushed or chilled, as ours often is, by a hasty word. "Lord," said first one and then the other of these sisters to him, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Here is something like a reproach for him from their wounded, anguished hearts; but he can pity their anguished hearts; he bears it.

It is *tender* sympathy that he displays. He can talk with Martha, observe, reason with and question her, for Martha can talk with him; she is calm and collected: but look at him when Mary comes, the tender-hearted, deeply feeling Mary. She cannot talk, she is not collected; she utters one short sentence

and throws herself at his feet. He meets her state of feeling also. Not one word does he say to her, but he asks immediately of the bystanders, "Where have ye laid him?" as though he could not bear the sight of that silent woman's sufferings, but is impatient at once to end them.

And it is *a general, extensive* sympathy we see in him. We are ready to think that Christ has compassion for those he loves only, his people, his friends. He has compassion, brethren, for all. The weeping Jews attract his notice here and touch his heart; and they do so with Mary at his feet, and Martha by his side, and the much loved Lazarus at a short distance from him in his grave. His compassion is as wide as he bids our compassion to be—it embraces all the suffering and all the wretched. And as for *its depth, its strength*—"Jesus groaned in the spirit," "he was troubled," "he wept"—these three sentences shew us that it passes in strength all human sympathy, and the utmost conceptions we can form of his. In a few minutes all the sorrow he beheld around him would be chased away; he well knew that he was going to chase it away; and yet it wrings his heart till he can scarcely look on it.

And this wonderful sympathy, brethren, still exists within him. We ourselves are the objects of it. We are so at this very moment, if we are in any grief, trouble, or adversity. The eyes, the mind, the heart, of Christ are upon us, and will be upon us till our grief or trouble is over. "Touched with a feeling of our infirmities," is the testimony the Holy Spirit gives us of him, not in his earthly, but in his heavenly condition; and it is as true as that he lives and reigns; as true as that we have infirmities, and can sometimes hardly find a friend on the earth to care for them. The Lord cares for them, the Lord in his high estate, the enthroned Jesus, our mighty Saviour, one who can help and succour as well as pity and feel.

VI. *The Lord Jesus, though he may delay his help in our afflictions, will ultimately fill our hearts with wonder and praise at the issue of them.*

"Where have ye laid him?" he said. The wondering people lead him to the sepulchre, and there takes place that astonishing scene which the words in the text describe. "Take ye away the stone," says Christ, as he stands, once more calm in his greatness, by the grave's mouth. He needed not their aid to

remove that stone, but he will not work by miracle when he can work in his ordinary way; he will seldom lay bare his own arm when he can effect his purpose by a creature's arm. "Take ye away the stone," he says. The terrified Martha cries out "No"—we often want to stop Christ when Christ is about to do something great for us. But he will not be stopped—the stone is removed. One look upwards, one word, for the people's sake, of his dependence on his Father, and then issues from his majestic lips the command, "Lazarus, come forth; and he that was dead came forth."

What a scene does this simple but sublime sentence at once place before us!—the awe-struck, shrinking multitude, the wondering sisters, the pale wondering man, the calm but inwardly exulting Saviour. And what after a moment or two must have followed? Some of you who have affectionate hearts, may say, "We can tell—those happy sisters will spring into that raised up brother's arms;" but others will say, "No; Martha may be there, but not Mary. She will be just where she was a few minutes ago, at her Saviour's feet; and not thanking and blessing him aloud there, but silent, with a heart ready to burst within her with adoration and love."

But looking at this scene with a more thoughtful eye, what have we in it? The design of God that we heard of at first in this history, accomplished—his glory manifested, Christ's glory manifested; and together with this, his mysterious conduct towards the friends he loved, cleared up; their griefs and troubles, their fears and suspicions, gone; their joy and their Redeemer's glory breaking forth together. Shall I lead you forward, brethren, to an hour yet future, when a scene somewhat like this, but far more happy and far more glorious, will take place? that scene when all "the mystery of God" shall be finished; when all his mysterious dealings with all his servants shall be made plain; when the glory of the Lord shall be revealed in its unveiled majesty, and all flesh shall see it together; a scene in which you and I shall see that the Lord, notwithstanding all he has done with us, is indeed good and indeed glorious, and that had we ten thousand tongues we could not praise him enough, or a thousand hearts we could not adore him enough? But there is another view to be taken of this spectacle.

Brethren, the hour is coming when not one dead man only,

but all that are in their graves, shall hear the voice of this Son of Man and shall come forth. This miracle was undoubtedly intended to remind us of this hour, and of the mighty power which the Lord Jesus will then manifest over the sleeping dead. In a few short years we ourselves shall sleep with the dead. Every one of us will as surely be in his grave, as he is now within these walls. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, will have ended our history. O that we could now feel—do that hard thing—feel as dying men! But this is not enough. O that we could all feel as men in whose ears that command will surely sound, “Come forth!” as men who are one day to rise out of their graves and live again! It will be so, brethren. We with our own ears shall hear this Son of Man’s commanding voice; we with our own wondering eyes shall wake up and see his face. What will follow? Where shall you and I be a short time after we have left our graves and beheld our Lord? with him or banished from him? adoring him in glory or blaspheming him in misery? in heaven or in hell? Surely this is a question worth the asking. Say not, he is a weak man, who deems it important; say rather, he is one of the weakest and most deluded of all men, who will not give it a thought.

Have you thought of it, and are you saying within yourselves as you think of it, “O let me find mercy of the Lord in that day?” If you would find it then, you must seek and find it now. All the mercy a sinner can ever need, is at Christ’s disposal; and one great end this miracle was designed to answer, is to let you see that the mercy you perhaps most need, is at his disposal. What does it proclaim to you? That the Lord Jesus has the human soul at his command; that he can do with the immortal spirit of a man whatsoever he will. And in what state is your soul? Dead perhaps, “dead in trespasses and sins;” buried and entombed in its own corruptions. You want him to do for you that most great and godlike work, the waking of you up from a death in sin to a life of righteousness. And he can accomplish this. It is his office and delight by his Holy Spirit to accomplish it. Shall I say then to you, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light?” O say rather to yourselves, “We must awake and arise, or we shall perish.” Say rather to him who proclaims himself here “the resurrection and the life,” “Lord, bid us live. Lord, be thou the resurrection and the life of our entombed souls.”

SERMON XLIII.

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE ISRAELITES DESIRING FLESH IN THE WILDERNESS.

NUMBERS XI. 33.—“And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague.”

THE journey of the Israelites through the wilderness, was attended with many startling events; but here is one of the strangest and most fearful of all. May a God of mercy bring home to every one of us the solemn lessons it conveys!

It naturally divides itself into two parts—the sin of which the people were guilty at this time, and the conduct of God towards them in consequence of it.

I. *Their sin* many of us may consider a trifle. Certainly it was not of that character which the judgment inflicted on them would lead us to anticipate. We read here of no enormous transgression, or daring violation of God's law. All they were guilty of, was a strong and indulged desire for something which God had not given them. “Something evil,” you will say perhaps, but not so; it was one of the most harmless things they could have desired. The Lord had provided them with manna for their support; they were weary of manna and wanted flesh. “The children of Israel,” we read, “wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?”

If any of you should think I am misrepresenting their offence, refer to the end of the chapter. The transaction was now over. The anger of the Lord had smitten the people, and they lay in

buried heaps upon the plain. To perpetuate the memory of the event, it pleased God to give the scene of it a new name, and one that should be descriptive at once of the people's sin, and his own righteous displeasure against it. And what does he call it? "Kibroth-hattaavah," that is, says the margin, "the graves of lust." And why this name? "Because," adds the history, "there they buried the people that lusted," telling us as plainly as words can speak, that their lust or coveting had been their destruction, and consequently had constituted their crime.

1. You see then, brethren, *the nature* of the sin we have before us. It is a sin of the heart—coveting, desiring; and that not slightly, but very eagerly, with the full bent of the mind. It is not spiritual idolatry, though it is like it. That is making too much of what we have; this is making too much of what we want. It is a longing for some earthly good, as though of itself it could make us happy, or at least as though there were no happiness for us without it. Rachel was guilty of this sin, when she said, "Give me children or else I die." David was approaching it, when he said, "O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem!" Ahab was sunk deeply in it, when he longed for the vineyard of Naboth.

You see too that we have a sin before us of very common occurrence; none more common. Every man that lives has perhaps, at some time or other, fallen into it. We ourselves have committed it. How many of us are guilty of it at the present time, the great God only knows; but let our hearts be laid bare, let their secret workings and desires come out, this congregation, notwithstanding all its decency and apparent seriousness, might present in one moment a mournful resemblance to the camp of Israel. We should see here desires as strong as ever disquieted that foolish people, and for objects as trifling. Some of you may say, "No," but such men know nothing of their own hearts, and very little of the hearts of others. No Christian man will speak thus. He will rather say, "I am verily guilty in this matter. I have fallen into this sin or approached it more frequently than I can tell. No object too contemptible to lay hold of my heart. It has ached for a bubble, and did not my God restrain me, it could ache for it again to-day, and so ache for it, as though that poor bubble were its all." And why is this? Because the believer's heart has nothing to satisfy it? O no.

2. Look at *the cause or spring* of Israel's sin. It did not arise from want. True, they were in a wilderness and a barren one, but their need was all supplied and abundantly supplied in it. They could not suffer hunger, for there fell daily for them food from the clouds. "God opened the doors of heaven," says the psalmist, "and rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food; he sent them meat to the full." Their desire for flesh was a desire springing up amidst abundance. It had its origin, not in their necessities, but in their vile affections, their own unsubdued, carnal minds.

And it is the same with you, Christian brethren, when you fall into this sin. Your situation in the world may be trying, but it is not your situation, that sets your desires roving; it is not want, or hunger, or desolation. A faithful God has provided for you in every condition enough and to spare. The root of the evil is in yourselves. You might eat angels' food; you might live every hour on heavenly bread and heavenly comforts; be as happy and satisfied in the wilderness, as though the wilderness were a Goshen; sing with David, "My cup runneth over;" and exclaim with Paul, "I have all things and abound;" but your own earthly affections get in the way. You thirst after earthly comforts, and earthly supports and pleasures, and then you say, "I am starving;" then you begin to ask, "Who will shew me any good?" Then perhaps some seeming good comes in your way, and you know what follows—you long for it as you ought to long for nothing but God, and labour for it as though you were labouring for heaven. Is it thus with you now? Then learn from this history that it is not your situation, which makes it thus with you. You are hungering for flesh with manna all around you. It is sin that does the mischief, the sin "that dwelleth in you," your own fallen nature. With that reigning in our hearts, paradise would not be large enough or happy enough for us; no, nor the kingdom of God.

But what frequently sets this evil principle at work? The chapter will shew.

3. Observe next *the occasion* of Israel's sin.

We are told in the twelfth chapter of Exodus, that when the people came out of Egypt, there came out with them "a mixed multitude;" that is, a crowd of foreigners and strangers, men not Israelites, who hoped to share the land of promise with

Israel, but who were not prepared to undergo any difficulties in order to obtain it. With this half-hearted throng, the sin we are examining began. We read in the fourth verse of this chapter, that "the mixt multitude that was among the people, fell a lusting;" and then the Israelites, contaminated by their example, lusted also.

And so it generally is. To associate with men of worldly minds, is to have a worldly mind. To mix with men of this world is, in most instances, to be one of the men of this world. We catch before we are aware their temper and spirit. The things they have, we desire to have. The things they value, we learn to value. What they are aiming at, we begin to aim at. We do not raise them, but they sink us. And then, after a time, what becomes of our Christianity? It is frittered away. It is retained perhaps in our creed, but every where else it is gone—gone, it may be, from our houses, and families, and chambers—gone assuredly from our hearts. The spirit of it is gone, the power, the savour, the enjoyment, of it. At last something else is let in to supply its place; nay, something else must be let in, for the soul that has once rested on God, will never let God go without finding some other object on which to rest. And what will that object be? Or rather, what may it not be? Nothing then will be too mean for us; we can stoop to any thing. Look at the fifth verse—the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick, of Egypt will do for us, and do better than the bread of heaven. O brethren, dread the mixed multitude. Stand in fear of worldly-minded professors of Christ's gospel. They will teach you, and teach you soon, to lust for the things you now despise. They will drive, if not the fear, yet the peace of God from your hearts, and all they will give you in exchange for it, will be a craving, aching soul, a share in their own restlessness and discontent. Turn again to Israel.

4. Mark *the effect* of their sin, its immediate effect, I mean, on their own minds. It made them completely wretched. "Our soul is dried away," they say. "We have no soul left, no inward enjoyment or life." They "wept again," we read, when they said, "Who shall give us flesh to eat?" And this weeping was not the shedding of a tear or two by a few of them in private; the tenth verse represents it as a general, and public, and violent weeping; "Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent." What a

pitiable spectacle ! Many thousand men shedding tears of bitterness, not from hunger and exhaustion, for they have food in abundance, but because they wish for a particular kind of food and cannot get it.

Incredible as this folly may appear, some of you well know where to look for a counterpart to it. There is now before your minds a period of your life, when some earthly desire entangled your soul ; and O the disquietude, and tumult, and at last the misery it occasioned there ! It withered all your spiritual comforts ; it hid your God from you ; it took away your relish even for your worldly mercies ; it made the whole earth a wilderness to you, barren and desolate, and you wretched in it. For want of one thing, you felt as though you had nothing ; and wept and wept again, as though God had stripped you bare. Ahab restless on his bed, heavy and sad, putting away his food, and all this with a kingdom at his command, because the little vineyard of Naboth is denied him—here in your estimation is no overcharged portrait : your own chambers have witnessed scenes as humiliating and strange. The truth is, the mind of man cannot long bear a strong and unchecked desire. It must be gratified or have a prospect of being gratified, or it consumes the soul. Nothing lays waste like it. It enfeebles and brings to nothing the noblest mind. It would unman a giant. It is harder to be borne than a severe affliction. Many a man who, by God's help, has sustained the one, and brought honour to his God by his calm sustaining of it, has sunk down in pitiable weakness beneath the other. Perhaps we may say, this is one main ingredient in the misery of hell—a longing, and a longing, and a longing still, for something that can be never had.

5. Notice one thing more in this craving of the Israelites—*its sinfulness or guilt.*

We are considering, you remember, a desire, not for any thing in itself evil or forbidden, but for flesh to eat—something lawful and permitted whenever it can be obtained. It is true, St. Paul says, in our epistle for to-day, when alluding to this transaction, that the people lusted after “evil things ;” but this is clearly a figure of speech ; he means that their lust was evil, not the things which were the objects of it. Wherein then did its sinfulness lie ? In the twentieth verse, God tells us. He pronounces it a contempt of himself. Moses is commanded to go to the weeping people, and say to them, “Ye have despised

the Lord which is among you." And how had they despised him? In three respects.

They had low thoughts of *his power*. "Who," they asked, "shall give us flesh to eat?" Who can give it? The psalmist represents them as openly questioning God's ability to give it; "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock that the water gushed out and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?"

And their conduct involved in it a making light of *his goodness*. They had evidently lost sight at this time of all he had done for them, or if not so, they lightly esteemed what he had done. Their deliverance from Egypt, the water from the rock, the manna from the skies, the cloudy pillar lighting them by night and shading them by day—all are as nothing, and this only because they have not flesh to eat. That one want makes them insensible to every mercy.

And then there was also here a despising of *God's authority*. He had not given them flesh; it was not his will to give it them; their restless desire for it was therefore a quarrelling with his will; a repining at him, because he dealt with them according to his good pleasure, and not according to their own.

And herein lies our guilt in many of our fondly indulged wishes. We say, "What harm is there in them?" We are ready to account it a small matter to be dissatisfied with what we have, and to be longing day after day for that we have not; but see here what God deems this thing, and what this thing really is—it is a limiting of God's power, as though he could not make us happy without the aid of this or that earthly good. It is a contemptuous undervaluing of his goodness towards us. It includes ingratitude, but it is more than ingratitude, and worse. That is thankless for mercies; this despises them. That eats the manna and gives not God thanks; this tramples on the manna and says, "It is not worth the eating." What contempt is there expressed in that speech of these Israelites, "There is nothing at all beside this manna before our eyes!" and how naturally does it seem to echo many speeches which we have made! With our cup well nigh running over with mercies, we have spoken of God's bounty towards us as though it were a petty, scanty bounty, and his love a pretence.

And this discontent treats the sovereignty of God also in the same spiteful manner, condemning him as a ruler as well as a benefactor. He says that he is the Disposer of all things; that all things in heaven and earth are his; that he is warranted to do with all things whatsoever he pleases, to give them, or withhold them, or take them away, as seems to him good. But "No," says the craving, dissatisfied soul, "I ought to have what I long for. I have a right to it. I have a claim upon it. If it is not given me, I am injured. It is not God's, it is mine." O brethren, little do we think how much sin some workings of our minds contain; how much guilt may be heaped up in only one cherished lust! Desires and feelings which we deem harmless, or at the worst not quite right, he deems all black together, aggravated sins, a setting of him at nought, nothing short of rebellion against him. And as such he treats them. The havoc which these things make in the soul, the happiness they destroy and the misery they inflict, do not satisfy his righteous anger—all this might seem their own natural, unaided work—he often adds something that we are constrained to see to be his work. There comes a punishment that declares and makes visible his displeasure. Tears and wretchedness were not the only fruits of Israel's sin at this time.

II. Look at *the conduct of their insulted God towards them in consequence of their sin.*

1. *He granted their desire.* We are told again and again that it displeased him, that his anger was kindled greatly against the people on account of it; but how does he shew his displeasure and anger? He begins with giving them the very thing they wish for; he works a miracle to give it them; he gives it them to the utmost extent of their desires, and beyond them. "There went forth a word from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth." The ground was covered for miles around, and every where more than a yard in depth, with the flesh they hungered for. What wonder as well as joy must have filled that weeping camp at the sight!—the very thing they longed for but despaired of obtaining, brought home to their doors, become theirs without money or price or pains or labour,

and so much of it theirs that they could not consume the half of it! And it is sent them too by their God. It comes to them like a token of his favour and tenderness. If they had one right feeling towards him within them, how must they have exulted, as they looked around them, in his seeming love towards them!

But what was God really doing all this while? He was only vindicating his aspersed honour. They had insulted him by limiting his power; they had openly challenged him to perform a work which they declared to be beyond him; he sends forth his word, and the work is done. As for his love towards them, it was not now in his thoughts; at least, it had nothing to do with this wonderful plenty. He gave it them in his wrath.

And nothing can we know of the favour of God towards us by any of the temporal gifts he bestows on us. We say of bereavements and disappointments, "These are judgments: my God is angry with me, and is punishing me." We say of gratified desires, of earthly success and abundance, "All is now well: heaven is smiling on me." But look here. This history discovers to us that God can give in his displeasure. "Israel," says the psalmist, "provoked the Most High in the wilderness." He dwells on the greatness of his anger against them. "The Lord heard them and was wroth," he adds; "a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger came up against Israel." And what was the result? "He gave them their own desire; they were not disappointed of their lust." It was the same afterwards. They wanted a king. "I gave them," says God, "a king in mine anger." The truth is, God is just as wonderful in punishing as he is in blessing. His ways of wrath are as mysterious as his ways of mercy. He frequently blesses us by thwarting our fondest wishes, and he sometimes most fearfully punishes us by granting them. Covet only spiritual gifts, brethren, a broken heart, a contrite spirit, communion with Christ, joy in the Holy Ghost, a pure and heavenly mind. These will never deceive or injure you. God never gave one of them to one of his enemies. But as for his other gifts, houses and lands, money and honours, children and friends—he will give them to any one, and sometimes he bestows them the most abundantly where he is the most displeased; he heaps them on his enemies, till men wonder for a time at their prosperity, and then at last wonder at their ruin. Turn again to the chapter.

2. *The Lord took vengeance on these Israelites*, and this in a fearful manner and at a very remarkable time.

It is often the will of God to make our sin our punishment. We eagerly crave something; he gives us what we crave, and when we have it, he either takes away from us all our delight in it, and so bitterly disappoints us, or else he causes it to prove to us a source of misery. And thus he might have acted now. Indeed if we refer to the eighteenth verse, we are ready to think that thus he is going to act. "The Lord will give you flesh," Moses is to say, "and ye shall eat. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days, but even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils and it be loathsome unto you." Disgust, we say, is to follow enjoyment, and then perhaps disease will come, and death. But it was not so. Provoked, it may be, by their intemperate indulgence in the food he had sent them, the Lord resolves to make at once a signal display of his indignation against these men. The quails shall not destroy them, he himself will destroy them. "He smites the people," smites them as it were with his own hand, sending "a very great plague among them," and thus desolating their camp and overthrowing many of them for ever. And he did this at a remarkable time; "While the flesh was yet in their mouth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people."

Sometimes God takes our abundance from us. He allows us to grasp the object we have been toiling for, and just as we grasp it, it goes. At other times he acts more fearfully towards sinners—he takes them from their abundance. His patience seems to last out till their desire is accomplished, and then leaves them for ever. "Soul, take thine ease," has been the language of thousands in the morning; God has answered them in the evening, and said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required." Israel smitten in the wilderness with the flesh between their teeth, is a mournful spectacle, a fearful spectacle; but it is one of a common kind. Men are every day falling into their graves at the moment when they are saying, "Now at last we will begin to live." O who can tell whether some of us may not thus fall into ours? If we have idols, in some way or other a separation must be made between us and them, and this may be the way in which it may please a holy God to make it. He seems to promise the worldly-minded man such an end as

this. Turn to the twentieth chapter of Job. It sounds like a commentary on this history. "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment. In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits. When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain it upon him while he is eating."

The main lesson we are to learn from all we have now heard, is not that perhaps which will most readily occur to some of us—our need of God's forbearance every hour we live, and his forgiving mercy, and the cleansing blood of his dear Son; it is rather this—our need of constant self-denial.

We have seen how much sin one cherished desire of man's depraved heart may contain, how much misery it may bring on, and in what an awful end it sometimes terminates. I do not mean that its end is in every case the utter ruin of the soul. This in every case is its tendency. Hither, if let alone, it will inevitably come. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"—that is the scriptural account of the matter. But the God of all grace sometimes stops this lust in its course. Never however does he stop it, even in the man he loves the most, till he has made it, in some way or other, a scourge and torment to him. The soul in no instance escapes unwounded from an entanglement of its affections by an earthly object. It is only by the interposition of Christ's special grace, that it escapes at all. And its wounds do not always soon heal. Perhaps they are rankling for years after, and there is generally a disfigurement and scar left. It was then no arbitrary dictate of his will, that led our Lord to say, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." He was looking at your heart and mine, brethren, when he said this; and he saw that in the very nature of things, we could not follow him or even belong to him, if these hearts had their bent. There is not naturally a single desire within them, which is not in some way sinful or may not become so. There is not one that we must not be made willing to sacrifice in following a holy Saviour to a holy world. A self-willed, self-indulgent Christian is not to be found on the earth; such a Christian never will and never can be found on it. Self-gratification is no gospel-blessing; nay, it runs counter to every gospel-blessing. We must not expect it or even wish for it on earth; we

must wait for it till we wake up in heaven. There indeed our desires may roam as they will, settle where they please, and go forth as intensely as they can, for all within us there will be pure and holy, all moving in a blessed conformity to the divine will; but here, liberty for our hearts is misery for our hearts, yea, it is ruin and death for us. We must bridle our desires as we would bridle the wild horse of the desert, who wants to bear us away to his native wilderness, and we must fetter them as we would fetter the untamed tyger or wolf. And even then they will destroy us, unless a mighty Spirit also bridles and fetters them. Self-denial is our duty, but it is not our safety, and must not be our hope. We may set about crucifying "the flesh with its affections and lusts," but if we expect to bind and slay this vile thing by our own power, we might almost as well leave it to itself. None can destroy sin in us, but Christ the great Saviour from sin. The work is his, and when we feel that it is his and implore him to do it, the work is done. We give him the glory, and he gives us the victory. "Sin," he then says, "shall not have dominion over you. Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

SERMON XLIV.

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

MARY ANOINTING CHRIST.

ST. MARK XIV. 8, 9.—"She hath done what she could; she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done, shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

WHO was this happy woman? we ask; and what had she done to be thus commended and honoured? We turn to the chapter, but her name is not mentioned in it. The Holy Spirit

however has taken care that it shall not be forgotten. St. John tells us twice over that it was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. The event itself occurred at Bethany, her own village, soon after the resurrection of Lazarus. We will consider, first, what she is said to have done; then, the probable motives of her conduct; next, the judgment which men passed on it; and, lastly, the notice taken of it by the Lord Jesus. And may that eternal Spirit who mercifully wrote this scripture for our instruction, now instruct us by it!

I. *What Mary did* was simply this. An inhabitant of Bethany, named Simon, a friend probably of Lazarus, made a supper or entertainment for our Lord. To this, as appears from St. John's account, Lazarus and his sisters were invited. Martha, like herself, instead of sitting down with the other guests at the table, "served" or waited on them—that was her way of shewing her love for Christ, and the honour in which she held him. Mary chose another way. While the entertainment was going on, she approaches our Lord, stands beside him as he sat, and breaking a box of ointment or oil, first pours it on his head, and then kneeling or falling down before him, anoints his feet with it, and, like another woman on another occasion, wipes them with her hair.

It may seem a trifling circumstance to mention, but yet whatever puts the stamp of verity on this holy book or on any part of it, is not really trifling—there is an ointment still known in the east answering exactly to the description the evangelists give us of this. They say it was "spikenard," "very costly," and so fragrant, that Simon's "house was filled with the odour of it." Now the ointment I refer to, still bears this name; it is one of the dearest of all the precious oils of the east, rendered so by the danger to life with which the grass it is prepared from, is obtained; and its fragrance is so penetrating, that even when brought into our climate, a few drops of it will fill with their grateful odour the largest room.

This then was the oil which Mary chose wherewith to anoint her Lord, and this anointing of him was the way she took to express her love to him. He says of her, "She hath done what she could;" that is, she could not have done more; she has gone in this act of hers to the very extent of her resources and power. And this is the bound, brethren, to which the Lord

Jesus would have all his disciples go in the service they render him, and the sacrifices they make for him. We are not to look around us and say, "What are our neighbours doing, those among them who seem to love Christ the most? If we do as much as they, it will be enough." We are to look at our own capabilities and opportunities; the talents, powers, means of usefulness, God has given us; and there, each one of us is to say, is the measure of my duty and the bound of my service. I am to do what I can. If the Lord has given me large means of honouring him, he looks for a large return of honour from me. If he has entrusted me with smaller means, he will be satisfied with less. It may be that I cannot cast in much into his treasury; I have it not to cast; but I have these two mites—there let them go.

This standard for our service is, you perceive, at once stimulating and encouraging. It is stimulating, for we are never to think we have done enough, while there is any thing more we can do; and it is encouraging, for it tells us that though we can do but little, that little will be accepted, nay, considered by our gracious Master as enough. We are not to condemn ourselves or to repine, because we can do no more.

But something else must be noticed here—*Mary did more than she was aware of doing.*

It is an affecting circumstance, brethren, that wherever our Lord was and however engaged, his death seems to have been always in his mind. It was in his mind here at a social meal and what we should have called a happy one, with those he loved the very best on the earth around him, and with the love of some of them towards him in the liveliest exercise. Lazarus, brought out of his grave by him, is seated by his side, Martha is waiting on him, Mary comes and anoints him. But his thoughts are even now, in this scene of holy love and happiness, at Gethsemane and Golgotha; he is thinking of his cross and grave. Mary's oil flows down on his sacred person. "She is come aforehand," he says, "to anoint my body to the burying. I am going to die, and she by this act of hers has silently told you all so, and, in the eagerness of her love, has prepared my body for the tomb before I am dead." Now we cannot conceive that any thing like this was in Mary's intention. Our Lord puts a construction on her act which she never contemplated, and makes it answer a purpose of which she had not once thought.

He turns it into an announcement to all around him of his approaching death.

It is a cheering truth, brethren, that we can never measure the use to which a gracious Saviour may turn our poor doings. As his designs in our afflictions often lie deeper than we can penetrate, so do his designs in the services to which he prompts us. We do this and we do that, and we mourn that it is so little, and that so little good to our fellow-men and so little honour to our God will come from it; but we know not what will come from it. That little thing is in the hand of a great, omnipotent God, and his mighty arm can bend and turn it we know not how or whither.

II. We must now ask what *Mary's real motives probably were* in this extraordinary act.

The strongest of them perhaps was *a feeling of grateful love for her blessed Lord*. He had just raised her brother from the dead; had just shewn a sympathy and affection for herself and Martha, which might well astonish her; had put an honour on her family she must have felt to be surpassingly great. "Thank him," she perhaps said within herself, "I could not when Lazarus came forth. I cannot now. My tongue will not move, and if it would, words are too poor to thank him. But what can I do? Kings and great men are sometimes anointed at their splendid banquets. My Lord is to be at Simon's feast. I will go and buy the most precious ointment Jerusalem affords, and at that feast I will anoint him. It will be nothing to him, but if he will suffer it, it will be much to me. My heart is ready to burst with thankfulness and love to him, and this will be a relief and joy to it."

You remember, brethren, the other woman who anointed Jesus. She had been a sinner, an open, flagrant one. It was a sense of pardoning mercy, which prompted her in what she did. "She loved much," we are told, "for much had been forgiven her." Mary too was a sinner, though not of the same class; and she doubtless felt her sinfulness, and loved her Lord for pardoning it; but no mention is made here of this. It seems to have been mainly thankfulness for what we call a temporal mercy, that prompted her to this beautiful act; a heart warm with gratitude for a restored brother, and for compassion shewn her while he was dead. Shall I tell any of you of the mercies

wherewith the Lord has called loudly on you for your gratitude and service? It is no Christianity at all, that does not make us deeply thankful for that greatest of all blessings, the pardon of a guilty soul; but it is a poor Christianity, poor in the extreme, which leaves a man's soul thankless for other blessings. Relatives spared, health restored, afflictions removed, comforts sent us in affliction, the Lord's presence with us then, and gladness poured into our sorrowful hearts then by his right hand—can you see such things as these in your past history, brethren? Then if you really love your Lord, you must say as you see them, more than "The Lord be praised"—you must say, "The Lord must have something from me for these benefits. What return have I made him? What return can I make him?" O make him some return, brethren, and make it at once. Go and buy the ointment, or if you cannot do that, cast in the two mites. Do something to shew that you are thankful for blessings, though that something be but little.

Mary was probably influenced also by another motive—a *desire to put honour on Christ*.

The Jews had lately driven him from Jerusalem. He had come back to it, as far at least as to Bethany, and raised her brother. We might have thought this stupendous miracle would have made them all believers in him, or at least appalled them into quietness; but not so—it only enraged them the more. St. John says, "From that day forth they took council together against Jesus for to put him to death." Once more our Lord withdrew from them into the wilderness; but now after a little he is returned. In what situation then does he now stand? In that of a hated, persecuted, proscribed man, driven hither and thither, every one forbidden to conceal him, and no one daring to shew him the least kindness or respect but at his own risk. Mary's soul must have been more than pained, it must have been indignant at this. "Let others hate him and spurn him," she must have said; "O for some opportunity of shewing how I honour him! Here is Simon's feast at hand, and if I buy the ointment, I shall not only indulge my love for him—there will be many spectators present—I shall let men see that there is one at least on the earth who honours him; one who thinks him worthy of more than all the honour she can ever pay him." And then this retiring, shrinking, we might almost say from her general character, this timid Mary comes forward, and in a pub-

lic room stands up with her precious oil, breaks her box, and with a modest but fearless hand anoints her Lord. I say "a public room," for in that country persons of all classes freely come in and out where others are eating, uninvited and unrebuked.

It is an easy thing, brethren, to honour Christ when others are honouring him, to shew respect to him, his gospel and people, when it is reputable and safe to shew it; to cry "Hosannah," when the multitude is shouting it; but real love for Christ makes nothing of this. It delights to honour him when none others will. It will come forward, and perhaps for the first time, when others shrink back. "You will be censured and scoffed at," men say, "if you do this or that now; no one does it." "For that very reason," real love answers, "I will do it. I would not willingly incur the reproach of my fellow-men, but if honouring my glorious Lord incurs it, I can bear it. Were others around me honouring him, my cold, selfish heart might be quiet; but when I see him, his servants and his gospel, hated and vilified, and scorned, it will not be quiet. I care not what I risk, nor what I lose, nor what I suffer, so that I may in some way shew I really honour the great Giver of all my blessings, the great Saviour of my guilty soul."

III. Let us now come to *the judgment men passed on Mary's conduct*. They censured it and strongly. "There were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? for it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and given to the poor. And they murmured against her." Here is human nature, brethren, in almost every word, and human nature as we may see it in common life almost every day.

Men are generally made angry by any act of love for Christ, which rises above their own standard, above their own ideas of the love which is due to him, and their own mode of shewing it. They will profess perhaps to admire such an act when it is done at a distance from them or by some one out of their own sphere; but let it be done close to them, by one like themselves, they will too often be displeased.

They can generally too find something in the warm-hearted Christian's conduct to give a colour to their displeasure. "Why was this waste of the ointment made?" It was a plausible question; it seemed a reasonable one. The ointment must

have cost Mary much; in our money, nearly ten pounds. "Why then," it might be said, "throw so large a sum thus idly away? Here is folly and worse than folly, here is ostentation, or if not that, here is culpable extravagance and waste."

And observe too—men can generally assign some good motive in themselves for the censure they pass on others. "This ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and given to the poor." Here is a regard for the poor made the ostensible ground for murmuring and indignation. "The poor have been robbed, and with so much distress around us, we cannot bear to see it."

And mark also—Christ's real disciples will sometimes join with others in censuring the zealous Christian. "There were some that had indignation," this evangelist says—some of the spectators, we think, unbelieving, prejudiced Jews; but we turn to St. Matthew, and he says, "When his disciples saw it, they had indignation." "What," we may ask, "the men who had forsaken all for Christ? the fervent Peter, the loving, affectionate John?" Yes; these very men. Without supposing that the disciples felt their own love for Christ eclipsed by Mary's and themselves cast by it into the shade, and were therefore angry, we may say, there is a too common disposition in really good men to fall thoughtlessly in with the feelings which prevail around them; to entertain and express uncharitable opinions of a Christian brother solely because others entertain and express them. Guard against this propensity, brethren. Either censure not at all, or think before you censure; enquire, understand, before you condemn.

But yet again—the censures passed on the servant of Christ often have their origin in some one hypocritical, bad man. Who began this cavilling, this murmuring against Mary? We turn to St. John's gospel, and he tells us it was Judas, Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. And why did he begin it? His own sordid, selfish feelings prompted him. He talks indeed of the poor and his concern for them, just as bad men in our days will talk of any thing to cloke their hypocrisy; but "he did not care for the poor," the evangelist says; "he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein;" and there is the explanation of the whole. The man sold his Lord a few days afterwards for little more than three pounds; it was no wonder then that he was angry and quarrelsome when he saw thrice that

sum lost to his bag, and to his peculating, dishonest hands. And so is it still among ourselves. Trace to their source the bitter censures with which many a faithful Christian is for a time assailed, you will often find it in the secret, unthought of baseness of some low, hypocritical man. But this is a dark part of our subject; let us turn to a brighter.

IV. The history now brings before us *the notice our Lord took of this woman's conduct.*

He, first, *vindicated it.* Others censured, he commended it. It is extravagance and waste, others said. No, said Christ, it is a good work. "She hath wrought a good work on me."

And observe how he vindicates Mary—with a wonderful gentleness towards those who had blamed her. As we read this scripture, it is almost impossible to avoid feeling indignant at the hypocrisy of Judas and the meanness of the other disciples. Had we been there, we are ready to say, and had known the truth, with what indignation would we have rebuked and exposed them all! But look at our Lord—not one word of rebuke comes from his patient lips. He does not attack one of them, not even Judas. All he does is to throw his shield over Mary, and say, "Why trouble ye her? Let her alone." But what was the fact? These men would have withheld from him the little honour Mary had shewn him; they thought it too much. In censuring her, they had covertly censured him for allowing her to pour the ointment on him. Yet where is his displeasure? where is his vindication of himself? We can find neither. All he says amounts to this, "Mary has done well, and you must let her alone. You may not understand her conduct, but I do—her conduct is right. You think she has shewn me too much love and honour. I will not answer that. She has done what she could, and I will not have her reproached. You must be quiet."

It was just the same when the other woman anointed him in the pharisee's house. The pharisee censured him directly for allowing such a woman to touch him. "She is a sinner," he said. Our Lord passes by altogether the censure on himself; he appears not even to notice it; but he vindicates immediately the woman and her conduct, as though he could not bear for one moment to have a sinner who loves him, assailed, nor an act of grateful love from such a sinner, condemned.

The practical lesson is, brethren, to adore the blessed Jesus

for taking us and our conduct under his protection, and while acting through his grace as he would have us, to feel ourselves safe, and more than safe, in his hands. "He that toucheth you," he says, "toucheth the apple of my eye;" and with such an assurance as this from him, we may be well content to let men touch us as they will. With our everlasting Lord for our shield, we may be well content to let every weapon of our own fall from our hands, even those weapons of self-defence which a Christian may sometimes use, but which he will use less and less the more he knows of his fellow-men, and the more he knows and trusts his Lord.

But this is not all—*our Lord recompenses this grateful woman* as well as vindicates her. "Wheresoever," he says, "this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done, shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." Mary had never looked for this; she could never have thought of it; and to what does she now owe it? We may say, to the self-denying act of love she had just performed. But we look at the history, and we are impelled to say, No; she owes it rather to the murmurings and hard speeches of these cavilling men. What is it that is promised her? It is honour amongst men, the admiration and praise of the whole church of Christ throughout all ages; it comes to her as a recompence for man's censure and reproach—a high reward, but yet an appropriate, suitable one. Our Lord had said long before, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven:" but here he anticipates this; there is a reward for this woman on the earth, and a wide and large one. Gainsaying men do not know what they are doing when they are shooting their arrows, even their bitter words, against Christ's servants. The arrow strikes and perhaps wounds, but they are drawing down a blessing from heaven on us by every wound they inflict. And Christ's servants themselves, when assailed by such men, often forget what they are doing. They may be a little misrepresenting and darkening our conduct, but can we not bear this? There is a recompence for us for every false word they utter, and either in time or in eternity, we shall have it. Is there any one here who for Christ's sake is reproached? Let him look at this censured woman of Bethany, and ask himself what her feelings were

when this gracious saying of her Lord first reached her ears. Such this day let his own feelings be.

And now, turning from Mary and her conduct, let us all think of ourselves and our conduct. What have we done for Christ? done from grateful love to him, from a desire to honour him? Some of us feel that we could scarcely ask ourselves a more humbling question. But there may be others who can ask it, and yet not be in the least humbled by it. They have done their best, they say; not all they ought perhaps, but, like Mary, all they could. And they really believe this, and are willing to stake the salvation of their souls on it, their everlasting destiny. This is fearful ground, brethren, for creatures like you and me to take. It will as surely sink beneath you as you plant a foot on it. "We have done all we could," you say. O no, beloved brethren; not you, nor any one of all the millions of mankind. What, have you never lost a single opportunity of honouring Christ, which you might have embraced? never withheld from him a single offering or service which you might have rendered him? never dishonoured him by any one folly or sin from which you could have kept yourselves free? You feel at once that these are assertions you dare not make, and yet "We have done all we could" is in effect saying the same. Mary would never have said any thing like this of herself. You may appeal to the text and say, "But her Lord said it of her." He said it indeed, but not of her whole life; he is speaking only of one extraordinary act of it. The probability is, that those amongst us, who use this language, have never yet really done any thing at all for Christ; that were they asked at this moment what sacrifice they have ever made for him, what self-denial practised, what painful cross carried, what labour of love performed, they would be silent, they could tell us of none. We are miserable sinners, brethren, and till we have discovered our misery and sin, and fled to Christ for deliverance as none but those who feel themselves perishing ever do flee to him, we want the spring within us, that will impel us to live to him. And what is this? It is a fervent love to him, arising out of a perception, a grateful feeling, of the immense things he has done for us. "We love him because he first loved us"—there is the secret of Christian obedience, Christian self-denial, Christian devotedness. We must take Christ as our souls' Saviour, we must trust and hope

in him as our Saviour; then shall we begin to love him, to act for his glory, and live to his praise.

As for you, brethren, who have learned and felt this, I would earnestly pray that what you have heard to-day may make you feel it again. To be reminded of what we ought to do for Christ and might have done, must send us anew to him as our Redeemer and Saviour, must cause us to feel anew that we have no other hope than his precious blood. Our shortcomings, the things we have left undone, we feel are enough to condemn us. Pardoning love, a sense of it—it is well to have that renewed; it is that which puts our minds in a frame to be thankful for every blessing, which lays us low in self-abasement one moment before our Lord, and then the next moment constrains us to get up and say, “Now for work; now for duty; now, if need be, for suffering; now for any thing that will shew our love for our Redeemer, that will bring honour to our glorious Master in this evil world.”

SERMON XLV.

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

A SINNER PRAYING FOR MERCY.

ST. LUKE XVIII. 13.—“The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.”

“Two men,” our Lord says, “went up into the temple to pray.” These two men he intends to represent two very common classes of men. They both come to the house of God, and they both pray there or profess to pray, but there is this important difference between them—the one prays aright, the other very far from aright; the one is accepted of God, the other rejected.

To which of these two classes brethren, do we belong? We certainly belong to one or the other of them, and the text will shew us to which. It sets before us the accepted worshipper. We shall find in him four circumstances to notice—the blessing he asks for, the character in which he asks for it, the manner of his supplicating it, and his success.

I. *The blessing he asks* is mercy; “God be merciful to me.”

But for this, you may say, we all ask; and true, in words we do. The fact however is, that some of us do not pray for mercy even when we think we are praying for it. We may have never once really prayed for it in our whole lives.

Did you ever ask yourselves what mercy is? It means, in common language, pity shewn to the miserable for pity’s sake. Strictly speaking, it ceases to be mercy, if the miserable have any claim on us. It takes then the character of justice. And mercy has exactly the same meaning in holy scripture. It signifies God’s kindness extended to miserable man of God’s own pure goodness. And because sin is our chief misery, mercy generally signifies the pardon of our sins; the free pardon of them; pardon given us, not, as is sometimes said, when we deserve pardon, but when we are altogether undeserving of it, when we can no more find any thing in us to recommend us to God’s favour, than we can find holiness in sin or brightness in midnight. Mercy has its origin in the depths of Jehovah’s own soul. His soul is ever full of it, even to overflowing. It wants nothing in man to give it existence, and nothing save misery in man to draw it forth. It flows from him with as little respect to our deservings, as the sun’s light has to the world’s darkness, or the showers of heaven to the earth’s drought. Even the sacrifice of Christ through which it comes to us, adds nothing to it. It is only a glorious channel the mighty stream has made for itself through mountains of difficulties, that it may reach our miseries. God loved us, he was mercifully inclined towards us, and because he was so, “he sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

You see then how easily we may mistake in this thing. Thousands are daily asking for something else under the name of mercy. We never really pray for mercy unless we supplicate it for mercy’s sake. Hear David pray for it. He makes mercy his plea for mercy, and his only plea. “Have mercy upon

me, O God; according to thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions."

II. We may turn now to *the character in which this man prays*. He says, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Look for a moment at the other man. "The pharisee," we read, "stood and prayed thus with himself; God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." And this language seems at first pious and good. He was different from other men; and a godly man must differ from others. He ascribes this difference to God, and God it is, who by his grace makes us to differ. He deems this difference a blessing and thanks God for it, and who can thank God enough if he has made him unlike an evil world? Wherein then was the man wrong? Before he begins the parable, our Lord tells us—he "trusted in himself that he was righteous." True, every thing around him declared the reverse. He was now in the temple. There before him were the priests supplicating the pardon of the nation's transgressions; there stood the altar of burnt-offering directly within his sight; either the morning or the evening sacrifice had probably at this time just been slain; look where he would, the whole temple proclaimed itself a temple built for sinners; it proclaimed to this pharisee the divine holiness and man's great guilt; yet he feels as he stands in it no guilt; he prays in this temple as a righteous man. His prayer, you observe, did not harmonize with the place he was in; nor did it correspond any better with his own character. All he says of himself might be true. He might not be "as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers;" but was he therefore righteous? No; he was in God's sight a sinner, and a most guilty and miserable one.

And we know too well where to find men like him. Our own church, just like this Jewish temple, tells us every where of human sinfulness. Both its sacraments set it forth to us. Baptism says we are polluted and need spiritual cleansing; and then comes the supper of the Lord, reminding us in the most affecting manner, by the emblems of his broken body and poured out blood, that we are offenders and heavy offenders against a holy God. Our prayer-book too is emphatically a sinner's prayer-book. It is not that it makes us call ourselves "miserable offenders" in one place and "miserable sinners" in another, it

has our great sinfulness in view in almost every prayer it contains; and blessed be God that it has! It would be no prayer-book for us, if it had not. And yet thousands come to our sacraments and use our prayers, shall I say, without one thought of their sins? If not so, yet thinking tenfold more of their righteousness; thoroughly well pleased with themselves; glad and thankful, just as this pharisee was, that they are not like other men.

But turn to the publican. What a contrast! He prays in a character that corresponds exactly with the temple-services, and also with the blessing he supplicates. There at the altar falls the sacrifice, and who needs a sacrifice but the sinful? He pleads for mercy, and who needs mercy but the guilty? And it is a blessed thing, brethren, for a sinful man to be thus willing to take his own proper ground when he prays. He must take it, if he means to obtain God's mercy. All the mercy that exists in God, boundless as it is, is mercy for sinners. The gospel which proclaims it to us, proclaims it as such. "Christ Jesus," it says, "came into the world to save sinners;" he died for sinners; yea, he still lives in heaven as an Advocate for sinners. To come then within the range of Christ's commission, we must be sinners. He has nothing to do with us if we are not, no more than with the angels in heaven or the lost angels in hell. And to obtain God's mercy through Christ, we must know and feel ourselves to be sinners. We must seek mercy as sinners, and as sinners we must accept it. Nay, brethren, as sinners we must trust in God after we have received it; as sinners we must hope in him; as sinners we must love him; and as sinners we must praise him. Some of you may say, "No; we will come before God as his beloved children;" and so you may; at least such of you as have fled for refuge to Christ the Saviour; but still you must come before him, you must pray to him and praise him, as his sinful children. Abel did so. He took a sacrifice when he drew near the Lord; he approached him, just as this publican approached him, in a sinner's character, and he was accepted. Cain felt no need of this. He got on other ground; he stood before God simply as a dependent and grateful creature, exactly as this pharisee stood; he brought his offering of fruits and flowers, but no sacrifice; and Cain was rejected. "The Lord had respect unto Abel and to

his offering, but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect."

III. Observe now *the manner in which this worshipper prays.*

And here again all is in harmony. His manner accords well with his character and his petition.

He is a sinner, and consequently he prays *most humbly*.

"The pharisee stood by himself," but it was evidently pride of heart, which led him to do so. He shrunk from the common crowd, and from this publican especially, as from one whose presence near him would contaminate him. The publican too shrinks from him, but for another reason. "He stood afar off," doubtless because he felt himself utterly unworthy to be near this seemingly righteous pharisee, or near any one who appeared really to love God. Here was one proof of his deep humility; and now see another. There is a being in heaven far holier than the holiest of mortals, and this the man knew. Mark the abasement of his soul before him. He comes into his presence in his temple, but when there, he feels there as though he could hardly bear his presence—"he would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven." He could not. He was like an offending child, that comes humbled and heart-broken to a forgiving father, and covers his face in shame and confusion as he comes, not daring to meet his father's glance. O for this prostration of spirit! Where shall we find it? Were we to say, no where, we should "offend against the generation of God's children." It is to be found, or something like it, in every man who is really drawing near God's footstool for mercy. There is not a man on the earth among those that have obtained mercy, who deems this humiliation strange. The young Christian may not know much of it—of what holy feeling does he know much? but every Christian knows something of it, and will assuredly know more. Ask the old Christian what he understands of it, the experienced and tried Christian, the man who rejoices the most in his Redeemer's mercy and has seen the most of his Redeemer's glory—ask him what his feelings often are as he prays. He will say, just as holy Job said, "I abhor myself." He will say just what the pious Ezra said, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God."

And it is cheering to see, as we look at this scripture, how

well the Lord Jesus understands all the workings of the stricken heart. He could never have felt as this sinful publican felt; he had never known sin, and could not know what shame and humiliation in his Father's presence were; yet here he describes them as naturally as though he had deeply experienced them. And you especially, brethren, may take comfort from this, who are now bowed down by these feelings. You cannot look up to God, you scarcely dare even to pray to him, so hateful and loathsome do you deem yourselves in his sight; but that God knows well the workings of your soul. He looks on you, though you dare not look on him; and never again will he take from you that look of kindness. "To this man," he says, "will I look, and look with all the care, and pity, and tenderness of my soul, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."

This publican prayed also *very earnestly*. He "smote upon his breast." No matter what led him to do so. It was doubtless a mixture of feelings. Indignation against himself, a sense of his own pollution and misery, a thrilling apprehension of coming wrath—these things took possession of his mind; they agitated him; and like a man driven to extremities, he could not restrain his agitation, he smote himself as he cried for mercy. He became exceedingly earnest in his prayer for it. He prayed for nothing else; he thought of nothing else. Mercy is every thing with him.

And what was it to you, Christian brethren, when you first felt your need of it? It was before a word, an ideal thing; or at best, it was something which you thought you might want one day or other, but for the present could do without. God however by his Spirit touched your heart, and then food for the starving, water for the fainting, pardon for the condemned, life for the dying—never were one of these things more eagerly asked for, than mercy by you. You prayed for it in some measure according to your great need of it and its own great worth. That was the happiest hour of your life, when you first dared to hope you had found it. O that some here who seem to pray for it coldly, might be led to ask themselves whether they ever pray for it at all! Remember what it is. It is God's mercy, his free and entire forgiveness, his abounding mercy, a mercy above all our sins, above all our wants and miseries, yea, above all our thoughts. We are undone for ever without it; we are happy

for ever with it. There is an eternity of dark, bitter misery before us—this mercy can save us from it. There is a heaven of rest and joy above us, and this same mercy can raise us to it. Can a cold prayer then for a blessing like this be a real prayer? No, never. Have we been aware of what we have asked for, when we have asked for this? Many of us have not. We have been trifling with this mercy, and trifling with the God who gives it. Lord, at length shew us mercy, and mercy especially for this, that we have so little valued or sought thy mercy.

IV. There is yet another circumstance in the parable to be noticed—the *success of this man's prayer*.

It was, first, *abundant* success, success beyond his petition. He asks for mercy, for mercy only; but hear our Lord; "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified." Had he said "pardoned," he would fully have met the man's request, but he goes beyond this—he says "justified."

The word implies that this poor, trembling publican was now accepted of God, and received by him into his favour. Not only has he forgiven him his iniquity and covered all his sin, taken away from him all his wrath and turned himself from his anger—the word intimates that the feelings of God towards him are those of love and delight; not a monarch's feelings towards a guilty rebel whom he has just pardoned and dismissed, but that monarch's feelings towards one who was a rebel, but whom now he has adopted and declared his son. It is the same word that is so often applied by St. Paul to those who stand before God washed in the blood, and clothed in the righteousness, of the Lord Jesus. They are still vile in themselves, and are still hateful to themselves on account of their vileness, but "They are to me," says God, "as dear sons and as pleasant children. I heed not their vileness. There is a robe on them, that covers all their shame; a robe wrought for them by the Beloved of my soul in the days of his anguish, and while I see that, I look no farther. I cast all their sins behind my back; their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. No holy angel in my own holy heaven is dearer to me than they." God never gives mercy only, brethren. When he gives this, he gives his love and his heart with it, all the blessings of his grace and all the riches of his glory.

See this beautifully shadowed forth in another parable. "I will arise and go to my father," said the prodigal in his misery. He goes, and what is there for him? Forgiveness, and then a hireling's place in his father's house? There is much more—a father's embrace and a father's love, the best raiment he can find for him and the best food. There is joy in his father's house on account of him, and joy in his father's heart. He is received as a beloved and faithful son. And thus the psalmist couples together the mercy of Jehovah, and the abundance of his goodness to his redeemed; "Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption."

This publican's success was also *immediate*. "I tell you," our Lord says, "he went down to his house justified."

We might have looked for some trial or some process to be gone through, before he should be fully pardoned. He himself perhaps, when he asked for mercy, was looking forward to some distant day, and praying that he might find mercy then, the mercy that Paul prayed for at Rome for his friend Onesiphorus—mercy "in that day." "But there is mercy for him now," says Jehovah; "I interpose no delay;" and the man goes from God's house to his own pardoned and accepted. An hour ago he was indeed a sinner; the iniquities of a whole life were on him and hell beneath him; now he is cleansed, and cleansed for ever, from all sin. One look at the slain sacrifice, one cry for mercy, has made that miserable sinner a child of God and an heir of heaven.

Is this strange to any of you? Is it almost passing your belief? Which of God's ways of mercy is not so? They are all strange, all wonderful, for that mercy itself is most wonderful. It is great beyond our conception of greatness. We can no more fathom it than we can fathom eternity; we can no more measure it than we can measure the distance between God and ourselves. God himself so describes it; "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon;" and then what measure does God give us of this abundant mercy? "My thoughts are not your thoughts," he immediately adds, "neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Am I speaking to any fellow-sinner who feels his need of mercy like this? who would deem even the most distant hope of it a blessing unutterable? Is there a man here, who can look on this publican as he stands crying for mercy in the temple, and say, "That man am I?" Then I would say to that fellow-sinner, and say it as one who must give account to the living God for every word he utters here, There is the same mercy for you, that this publican found—exactly the same—free mercy, abounding mercy, immediate mercy. Nay, there is no other mercy for you. It must be this or none. Our God is a great God, and there is no partial, no limited mercy with him. Mercy is his delight, and when he gives it at all, he gives it in a large measure, with his whole heart and his whole soul. And he gives it at once. One touch of Christ's garment made a sick woman whole, and immediately whole. One believing look at Christ on his cross, one prayer to Christ on his throne, can bring mercy to you, and bring it now; yes, make at this very moment such a change in your condition, that did you enter these walls a child of wrath, you shall leave them a son of glory; you too shall go down to your house justified. It does not follow that you would at once be aware of this change. We are not told that this man knew he was justified, but justified he was. And justified shall you be, and every child of man, the moment God's mercy is implored, and God's promises in Christ Jesus embraced. Your "iniquity shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and your sins, and they shall not be found."

Shall I end here, brethren? O that I could, and feel I had said all that I ought! But you remember how we began. The Lord Jesus did not deliver this parable to encourage the contrite, but chiefly to reprove and alarm the self-righteous. While this trembling worshipper goes down to his house justified, he shews us another worshipper going from the temple just as he entered it—well pleased with himself, better pleased perhaps than he was before, but, alas! not justified. The burden of sin still rests on him, and the displeasure of God follows him. All he has gained by his worship is worse than nothing; he had better not have gained it. It is only an increase of his self-complacency and pride.

And it is a mournful thought that this man is only a picture of some of you. Christ intended him as a picture of some of you. "There," he says, "look at that pharisee; that decent,

moral, self-delighted, but unpardoned pharisee ; and say as you leave my courts, each one of you to himself, Thou art the man. Thou hast come here, where all thou hast witnessed has told thee of thy sinfulness and misery. Thou hast come to a temple built for sinners ; thou hast joined in prayers written for sinners ; thou hast heard of a Saviour, who came into the world to save sinners ; thou hast listened to a gospel which proclaims mercy, free and abundant mercy, for the chief of sinners ; there is a happy heaven, thou hast been told, set open for sinners ; but what has been the language of thy heart ? I may be a sinner, but I have not felt here as one ; I have not really prayed as one ; I have not attended to the sermon I have heard as though I were one. I have rather thanked God that I am not one, but a good and righteous man. I am now going home, and in what frame of mind ? Loathing myself for my guiltiness, and anxious to get alone and cast myself down before an offended God, and implore his mercy ? No, let this or that guilty man among my neighbours act thus. I have no need. The Lord is already well pleased with me." O brethren, a real believer in Christ would not have his soul in your soul's stead for a thousand worlds ! This satisfaction with yourselves, if it is not shaken, will prove your ruin. May the living God by his mighty Spirit shake it ! May he force from you this day, in spite of yourselves, this humble but blessed prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner !"

SERMON XLVI.

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR ONESIPHORUS.

2 TIMOTHY I. 18.—“The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.”

WE had for our meditation on the last sabbath the prayer of a contrite sinner for himself. We have here a holy Christian's prayer for one of his fellow-Christians. It is a petition of the apostle Paul for Onesiphorus, a person who had shewn him great kindness. We might have supposed that the blessing it supplicates would be different, something of a higher character, but it is the same; and the prayer itself is very like the other, short and simple. The same Spirit prompted it; we could readily have believed it to come from the same man.

The instruction it contains, is of a very serious nature. May the Lord open our understandings to receive it! And more—may he send us to our homes feeling, and feeling deeply, its importance!

The passage offers three things to our notice—first, mercy; then, a particular day in which this mercy will be needed; and then, a prayer that this kind-hearted Onesiphorus may find this mercy in this day.

I. *Mercy* is a word we are often using, especially in our prayers. Our church teaches us to ask for this blessing more frequently than for any other, and there is nothing we have oftener supplicated in our chambers and families. But there are some of us perhaps, who have no very clear ideas of what mercy is. I must remind you again that it is not mere kindness or goodness. To ask God to shew us mercy, is not simply to ask God to do us good. Such a petition includes in it a confession of

our wretchedness and our guiltiness ; for observe—misery is the proper object of mercy. Mercy, in the strict sense of the word, is kindness exercised towards the wretched ; but then there is another use of the term and a more common one. Because our guilt is our greatest misery, mercy often signifies in scripture pity shewn to the guilty ; in other words, the forgiveness of our sins. Our prayer-book attaches both these ideas to the word, it connects both these things with it, our misery and guilt too, when it leads us to pray that God, the Father of heaven, would “have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.”

In some respects mercy resembles goodness. It is indeed the very same thing, only its object is different. God is good to all, and always has been so ; but he was never merciful, till misery appeared needing his compassion. He is good in heaven ; every angel there feels and proclaims him such : but there is no mercy in heaven, for there is no guilt there or wretchedness. Our world is the only world where mercy is exercised, Mercy first came into being here ; or if not so, here for the first time it was seen. Our world appears to have been built for mercy. We ourselves seem called into existence to draw it forth out of the divine mind, to keep up a display and exhibition of it, to let the universe see that there is mercy in Jehovah, and that as great and glorious as any of his other attributes.

And then again mercy is closely allied to grace. If it differs from it at all, it is in this—when we speak of grace, we have respect chiefly to the motive of the giver ; when of mercy, to the condition or character of the receiver. Look at God, and then we call mercy grace ; look at man, poor, abject, guilty man, and then we call grace mercy. Grace is goodness exercised spontaneously, freely. It is kindness springing out of kindness, and nothing else ; never looking at the character of its object, but at once settling on and blessing it. Mercy is that same free goodness in operation towards the wretched. It is grace flying to the aid of misery and the pardon of guilt. Grace regards us simply as undeserving ; mercy as undeserving still, but worse—as miserable and sinful.

You see then, brethren, that mercy is the perfection of the divine goodness. It is that branch or exercise of it, which goes the farthest and does the most. It is goodness blessing us when we merit cursing, and saving us when we are well nigh lost. Hence God is said in the scripture to “delight in mercy.” His

goodness can expand itself in it. He finds in it the freest scope, the largest indulgence, of his benevolence. It is not merely the work, it is the enjoyment, the feast and triumph, of his love.

And you see also here another fact, that no man can ever deserve mercy. We often put these two words together, but we ought not to do so; there is a positive contradiction between them. Mercy is grace. It is kindness towards one who has no claim whatever to kindness and is totally undeserving of it. Consequently the least merit on our part annihilates mercy; it turns it into right and justice. The two things cannot in any case exist together, and for this plain reason—they are altogether contrary the one to the other. So argues the apostle, though in different terms. Speaking of the favour God bears his people, "If," he says, "it is by grace, then is it no more of works" or desert, "otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work." The one, he implies, must destroy the other. We cannot ascribe our salvation, or any thing else, to grace and works also. In other words, we, miserable sinners, never can deserve mercy. It must come to us, if it ever comes to us, as pure mercy. We must seek it as such, or in fact we are not seeking it at all; we are asking for justice under another name.

II. Let us pass on now to *the day the apostle speaks of*.

And observe—he does not describe this day; he does not even tell us what day he means; but there is no misunderstanding him: he means the last great day, the day when God will raise the dead and judge the world. And this mode of referring to this day is common in his writings. There is another instance of it in the twelfth verse of this chapter, and yet another in the fourth chapter of this epistle. It intimates two things.

First—*the apostle's thoughts were often dwelling on this day*; it was a day very frequently in his contemplation. His mind had evidently become familiar with the prospect of it, and so familiar, that he could not help speaking of it as he would of any well known and much thought of thing. "That day," he says, as though he believed that Timothy also, as well as himself, had his eyes constantly fixed on it; that no one could possibly at any time forget it; that every one who should read his writings, would have his soul full of it.

And so it seems really to have been in the early ages of the Christian church. We put the day of judgment far from us ; we regard it as a day that will certainly come, but after so great an interval of time, that the thought of it need not press on us ; but not so the first believers. Their minds were fastened on this day. It was a day they were constantly anticipating. Their expectations, their desires and hopes, centred in it. St. Peter describes them as "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." They "looked for" it ; that is, they were like men looking out anxiously in the east for the first dawn of some long wished for day, like men climbing the lofty mountain to get the first sight of the rising sun on some festal morning. They "hastened unto" it ; that is again, they would have met it if they could, they longed to spring forward to it, they were impatient for its coming, they would willingly have annihilated all intervening ages to bring it near.

But there is something else implied in this expression. It intimates also that *this day is a most important one*. The apostle would never have spoken of it thus, were it not a day of the very utmost importance. There is the idea of pre-eminence contained in his language. It is a great day, it says, the greatest of all days. No other day is worthy to be compared with it.

And one moment's reflection shews us the truth of this. We feel as soon as we begin to think, that we cannot estimate as we ought the importance of this day. It will affect every body and every thing on the face of the earth, and to the greatest possible extent. Other days are important to some, but this will be important to all. It will shake the whole world. As for ourselves, we are to leave our graves in this day ; our bodies and souls are to come together again after a long separation. We are to take our trial for eternity in this day ; to answer at God's bar for all we have done, and said, and thought, in the days of our mortal flesh ; and when this trial is ended, our final condition is to begin. We shall no longer have the earth to live on : it will have passed away. We shall be in a new world : we shall have entered on a new and untried mode of existence, and that an eternal one. We shall find ourselves among everlasting burnings or never ending glories. And it is their eternal duration, which gives to the events of this day such tremendous importance. Other days have brought us sorrows, but the morrow has come and ended them. Other days have brought us joys, but

the morrow has taken them away. This day however knows no to-morrow. There is no end to it; there are no changes in it. It is the beginning of one long endless day of sorrow or of joy, a day of unbroken sunshine or of constant storm and terror. Well then may the apostle call a day like this "that day." Well may he speak of it as an extraordinary and important one. Well may he pray for his friend, that he may find mercy of the Lord when it comes.

III. Turn now to *his prayer*.

He brings together in it, you observe, the mercy and the day we have been considering. He prays that Onesiphorus may in the one find the other; "The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day."

We cannot enter into the spirit of this prayer, unless we keep in mind throughout the character of this Onesiphorus. He was evidently a real Christian. The apostle does not say so, but he implies as much. He stood by him, he says, when all the other professors of Christ's name in Asia had deserted him; "he sought him out very diligently" when in prison, "and found him;" he "oft refreshed him, and was not ashamed of his chain." And these kind offices, we may fairly presume, he rendered to the apostle for his Master's sake. This kindness under such trying circumstances, this stedfastness and boldness in the face of shame and danger, were the fruits of his faith in Jesus. They are evidences that he was not only a sincere believer in the gospel, but a man of extraordinary faith and love.

The inference then that we draw from this prayer, is this obvious one—*our final salvation, the deliverance of even the best of men in the great day of the Lord, will be an act of mercy.*

It is sometimes spoken of as an act of justice, and such it really is, if we view it in reference to the Lord Jesus. Before he made his soul an offering for sin, it was promised him that this stupendous sacrifice should not be made in vain. "He shall see his seed," said the great God of heaven. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. My righteous servant shall justify many." When therefore he comes in his glory, he will come, not only as a Judge to try the world, but as a Servant of Jehovah to claim his reward; or rather as a joyful Bridegroom to receive the bride he has so dearly ransomed and

purchased. The equity of Jehovah will give to that once crucified but now triumphant Son of Man, a multitude that no man can number of redeemed souls.

And the scripture speaks of our salvation as a righteous thing in another sense—the Lord Jesus has led his people to expect it. Just as his Father promised it to him, so has he promised it to them. It matters not how unworthy they may be of it, the word of the Lord has gone forth; his people have all confided in that word; and now justice itself, assuming the form of faithfulness, declares aloud that salvation must be theirs. Hence the apostle says in this epistle, that “there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give him at that day.” And to the Thessalonians he says, that “it is a righteous thing with God” to recompense his troubled servants with rest, “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed.”

But look to the text. The apostle implores in it mercy in that day for his godly friend; and what does he mean? If he means any thing, he means this—that after all, it must be mercy, free and abounding mercy, that must save that friend, if he is ever saved. He can talk of justice and of righteousness as he looks at his Master on his throne, and remembers what he has done and promised; but when he looks on a fellow-sinner, he loses sight of justice altogether, and can speak of mercy only; and he speaks of this, as though it were something great and marvellous for a creature like us to find; “The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.”

And observe too how this is said. It is not cold language. It is language coming warm from a most tender and deeply grateful heart. If you examine it carefully, you will see that it is what we call a parenthesis, an ejaculation thrown in while the apostle is speaking of something else. He is recounting the good deeds of Onesiphorus towards him, but he cannot get to the end of them without stopping to pray for him; and his prayer for him is, that he may find mercy of the Lord at his coming. Now mark the force of this. The good works of this man were all before Paul at this time—his boldness in Christ's cause, his steadfastness, his kindness; the apostle's mind was evidently filled with admiration of him, and his heart glowing with love towards him; yet what in this ardour of feeling does he say? The Lord recompense him after his works?

The Lord reward and bless him? No; he sees in this devoted Christian of Ephesus a miserable sinner like himself, one going soon to Christ's judgment-seat, and his only prayer for him is, that he may find mercy there. And yet, brethren, some of you can look forward to this judgment-seat, and as you think of what you call your good and useful lives, dare to expect there a reward of justice. O may the living God shew you this day your folly! We are sinners, and there is no hope for you, or me, or any child of man, but that which rests on the mercy of God to sinners; a mercy which must come to us as undeserved as it came to the thief by the dying Saviour's side, or as it will come to the guiltiest sinner it will ever save.

Thus much, I conceive, is implied in the apostle's prayer. As we review the solemn truths through which it has led us, many thoughts present themselves to us. There are two we must not pass over.

First—*we all still need mercy.* There is a notion that a sinner once pardoned, has done with this blessed thing; that he may cease to seek it, and almost cease to think of it. And this notion is grounded on false conceptions of the sacrifice and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is error, and gross error, resting itself on truth.

Think again of what mercy is. It is only another name for the divine goodness exercised towards the sinful. It is God's love coming to us in the character of grace, and when come, pardoning our guilt and relieving our wretchedness. As long therefore as there is one trace or stain of sin within us, we need mercy; every blessing we receive from heaven, come how it may, must come to us as mercy. If we are not the objects of God's mercy, we are not the objects of God's favour, we are not within the sphere of God's love. We can never have done with mercy as long as we are in the way to heaven; or rather, mercy will never have done with us. What said David? "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;" goodness, he means, in the character of mercy. "All the paths of the Lord," he says again, "are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant."

And notice also this remarkable fact—in all his other epistles, the salutation of this apostle to his friends is, "Grace unto you and peace;" but when he writes to Timothy and Titus, men like

himself, faithful and beloved, eminent in Christ's church, he alters this salutation. As though to force on our minds the point I am urging—a conviction that the holiest of men still need God's mercy—he adds this word “mercy” to the other two. In each of these epistles, his salutation runs, “Grace, mercy, and peace.”

And turn again to the text. It tells us that even in the great day of the Lord, our need of this mercy will still remain. “What,” you may say, “when we wake up sinless?” I answer, Yes, when we wake up sinless, even with the robe of Christ's glorious righteousness on us, and we cleansed thoroughly in his blood. Our past guilt will ever keep us mercy's debtors and dependents on mercy's bounty. It was mercy, that first washed us in that precious blood; it was mercy, that put that glorious robe around us; and having done so much for us, mercy will not now forsake us. It is mercy's voice, that will pronounce us blessed; mercy's hand, that will open heaven to us; and mercy's power and riches, that will make us happy in it. Hence the heirs of heaven are called by this apostle “vessels of mercy prepared unto glory;” and Jude, another apostle, calls the very glory they look for, mercy. It is “the mercy,” he says, “of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life;” mercy that becomes at last salvation, mercy laying aside the form of earthly grace and consolation, and shining forth in the splendour of heavenly joy.

And turn, brethren, from scripture to your own hearts. A heart full of holy feeling is no bad interpreter of a text like this. What should you say were the trumpet even now to sound, and the heavens to be opened, and the Son of Man to appear? You may speculate while at your ease; you may discuss subjects of this kind, and come to most strange conclusions; but place the great throne before you and your great Judge on it—there is not a godly man among you, who would not forget in one moment all his reasonings. Every one of you would say, “O let me find mercy in this day! God be merciful to me a sinner!” And were you in heaven, what would you say? The same feeling would go with you there. Mercy would no longer indeed be your prayer, but it would be your song, and the highest and sweetest song that you could sing.

This scripture says therefore to all the people of God among us, Think more of God's mercy; give it a higher place among your blessings; expect more from it; rejoice more in it; make

it oftener the subject of your praise. "O give thanks unto the God of gods, give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his mercy endureth for ever."

And there is another thought suggested to us by this scripture—*we all must find mercy*. It is something to be sought and obtained.

O the folly of men! They will profess to value mercy and hope for it, and yet never seek to make it their own, never even ask for any interest in it. God's mercy bears this inscription on it, written with God's own gracious hand, "Ask and ye shall have; seek and ye shall find. Every one that asketh, receiveth; and every one that seeketh, findeth." O the riches of his goodness! but O the perverseness and infatuation of our minds! We think the terms he proposes hard; we may have his mercy by merely asking for and seeking it, but we deem it not worth the asking or seeking, and claim it as our own at a cheaper rate—without an effort or a prayer. This will not do, brethren. This scripture tells you it will not. It speaks of mercy, not as a thing of course even to the holy Christian—Paul implores it for his godly friend; and in another place he calls on all his fellow-Christians to go with him to the throne of grace, that they may obtain it. How then can you look for it to come to you unsought? It never will so come. Nay, it will never come to you should you seek it, unless you seek it in God's own prescribed way—through the blood, and righteousness, and intercession, of his dear Son. Christ is the treasure-house of mercy. There is an ocean of mercy for us in him, for the guiltiest of us and the most comfortless—mercy that is inexhaustible, boundless, eternal—tender mercy, sweet and joyful mercy—mercy in life, mercy in death, mercy in judgment; but there is not a particle of mercy for any one of the sons of men out of him. You may talk about it while at a distance from Christ, and you may hope for it and expect it; but you will no more have it, than you will have a day without the sun, or a stream without a fountain. And here lies the real value of such a sermon as this. If it does us any good, it will lead us to the Lord Jesus Christ. It will lay us in the dust before him, crying, "Mercy, Lord; thy mercy; mercy for a most miserable and sinful soul; mercy now; mercy in that day!"

SERMON XLVII.

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE SERVANTS OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN.

REVELATION XXII. 3, 4.—“His servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads.”

IF you really love the Lord Jesus, brethren, it is one of your greatest griefs that you are able to render him so little service. You would be as a flame of fire before him, but you often feel that a marble statue could scarcely be colder than yourselves. There is however this comfort for you under this grief. The Master you serve loves you so well, that he delights in any service from you, however poor; and if this be not enough, here comes this text and says, a day is at hand when the service you render him, shall be all you desire. O may that Spirit who tells us this for our comfort, enable us now to draw comfort from it! May he lead up our thoughts to the heaven he dwells in, and give us a glimpse into that happy world!

Taking the words as they occur, we may notice in them,

I. *The title they give to the redeemed in heaven*—Christ's servants.

That the evangelist is really speaking of this happy people, there can be no doubt. He has just spoken, at the end of the last chapter, of those “who are written in the Lamb's book of life,” and these, we know, are not angels; they are sinners whom that Lamb has redeemed from among lost men.

They were his servants on earth. Sometimes indeed he would not call them so. He called them his friends and even his brethren; but this condescension of his did not alter the fact—they were his servants; and it did not blind their eyes to the fact—they knew they were his servants, and they acted as such, and

gloried in being such. And now they are in heaven, they are his servants still.

You must remember that whatever character the Lord Jesus sustains towards us now, he will sustain for ever. Is he here to us the Lamb that was slain, the atoning Lamb? He is the same in heaven; the Lamb still; not atoning there, but yet appearing there as the great Atoner, and adored as such. Is he our King here, ruling over his church with a Sovereign's authority and majesty? In heaven he is a Sovereign, and ever will be; he is the Lamb on a throne; we shall still be his subjects. Is he now a Master to us, giving us laws and requiring us to obey them, and allotting us day by day our work and expecting us to perform it? He will not lay aside his claims on us when he takes us to heaven. No matter what honour he puts on us there, he will put it on us as a Master stooping down to a servant. Our place in his house may be lofty, and the robes he may give us to wear may be splendid; but after all they will be the robes of a servant, and our lofty place will be a servant's place; we shall stand in it in a servant's attitude and with a servant's obedient, submissive mind. Look below us or around us, we shall be kings and reign; but look above us, there higher than we sits the Lamb on his throne, and we are kings no longer; we bow down and serve. O happy service! It will not degrade us in our high estate. We are not called in this text by any mean or common name. Which of us had not rather be Christ's servant in heaven, than a leader of angels there, or the ruler of a world?

II. We find mentioned next in this passage *the employment of the redeemed in heaven*. They are to be actually servants, you perceive, not nominally such. There is a service they are to render; "His servants shall serve him."

Observe *whom we are to serve*. The text says "him;" but if we look back to see who this is, we find two persons mentioned, God and the Lamb; yet here they are not spoken of as two, but one. It is not said their servants, but "his servants;" and we are not to serve them, but "him." See then how naturally and clearly this truth discovers itself—God and the Lamb are one, and in heaven appear as one, and are served as one. There is only one throne in heaven, and he who sits on it, is "God manifest in the flesh," God in Christ, God wearing the form he took

on himself at Bethlehem, the form he carried up into heaven from Mount Olivet and has never since laid aside. We shall serve him in the character in which we know him best and love him most, the once suffering, but now happy, glorified, and triumphant Son of Man.

As to *the nature of our service* in heaven, the text says nothing, and we know but little.

We know partly how the angels are employed. They are God's messengers flying hither and thither through the universe to execute God's will. He could accomplish it without them, by a word, by a single movement of his mighty mind; but he does not so accomplish it; he condescends to make his angels his instruments and fellow-workers. "They do his commandments," the psalmist says, "hearkening unto the voice of his word." They are "ministers of his, that do his pleasure."

Now it may be that the glorified saints are employed in this manner; that they go often side by side with the angels on errands of love from world to world. We see them not; we think not of their being near us; but here perhaps they come, holding intercourse with our minds, and bringing down comfort and refreshment to us from God's right hand. This is possible; it may be so; but scripture no where says it is so. On the contrary, this book, which speaks more of heaven than all the other parts of scripture together, seems to confine the services of the redeemed to heaven itself, and the immediate presence and dwelling place of the Lamb there. It always places them there. It often describes heaven as a temple, and them as worshippers in it and the adoring priests of it. They are "before the throne of God," it says, "and serve him day and night in his temple."

We are on sure ground then, when we think of our service above as temple-service; as of the same nature with our service here, when the sabbath comes and we assemble together in God's house, and bow down before him and praise him, admiring his perfections, magnifying them, and longing to make them known wherever there is a creature to know them. Think of heaven as one long, unbroken, never ending sabbath; and think of yourselves as God's priests and ministers through that long sabbath; and then perhaps you have as correct an idea as we can now form, of the nature of our future service in glory.

Need I say, brethren, how well fitted a redeemed sinner must

be for such an employment as this? Mercy, God's brightest perfection next to his holiness; pardoning mercy, the highest exercise of that love which forms, as it were, God's essence—it is all theory to an angel. He may admire it and give glory to God for it, but not as one who has felt and experienced it. If the Lamb is to be worshipped, surely those whom that Lamb has redeemed, are the fittest to worship him. While they speak of his power to save as none others can, and sing of his grace and love as none but they can sing of them, they are living proofs of the might of that power and the riches of that grace and love. The mere presence of a redeemed sinner in heaven seems enough. It is a nobler setting forth of Jehovah's glory than any words could be, than all the songs of all the angels. "Him that overcometh," says our Lord, "will I make a pillar," a trophy, a monumental column, "in the temple of my God."

And mark further—the apostle's language intimates strongly *the excellence of that service* we shall render to God hereafter; its excellence, I mean, as compared with any service we can render him now.

"His servants shall serve him." Here they do not serve him. The best they do, is only an attempt or effort to serve him. It does not merit the name of service. But there, in that higher world, they shall serve him indeed. Our worship of him shall be as different from what it is now, as we ourselves shall be different from what we are now. We shall worship him as we now sometimes wish and long to worship him, and cannot, and above all we now wish and long to do or have any conception of. Once we knew not how the heart of a pardoned sinner can burn at his Saviour's feet here on earth, and melt with love to him; it was all mystery to us. Just so now—we know not how a glorified sinner's heart can love his Saviour in heaven, and how he can praise him there; that is still a mystery. Here we are only preparing for this blessed work; in heaven we shall perform it. Here we are only learners; we are like men endeavouring to speak a language which is not their own: there, speaking in a tongue become at last familiar and easy to us, we shall be able to teach others "the wonderful works of God." Here our service is often such, that a fellow-creature would not take it at our hands; we should be ashamed to offer it him: there it shall be, we dare not say worthy of the lofty Being to whom we render it, but such as he can receive with visible approbation and

pleasure; it shall be less unworthy of him than any service which was ever offered him. It shall come from creatures raised higher than he ever raised any others, and they shall offer it him in the full perfection of their nature, with the full strength of their powers. He has loved them with his whole heart and his whole soul, and they shall now at last love and praise him with all their heart and soul. "His servants shall serve him," serve him as they never did before nor any besides them.

But turn again to the text.

III. It brings before us *the happiness of the redeemed* while thus serving Christ in heaven.

Some of you may say, "His service will be happiness enough. It must make happy, and supremely happy, all who are engaged in it." And I might answer, Yes. Could we so worship God now, this present world would cease to be the cheerless world we find it; and as for this house of prayer, how would it be changed! We should hardly believe it to be the same. It would be none other to us when the sabbath came, than "the house of God and the gate of heaven." But there is something connected with this service above, which adds to its happiness. "His servants shall serve him," the text says, "and they shall see his face."

This is *what every servant of Christ desires*. I do not mean that he will desire it hereafter—he desires it now; and not as he may wish to see some of his fellow-servants, a Peter, or John, or Paul; or as you may wish to see this or that great man of the earth, of whose fame you have heard: he desires it ardently, as you would desire to see the friend of your soul, if you had but that one friend and he had been long far away. None but the Christian himself can tell how a Christian sometimes longs to see his Lord. Jacob did not so long to see his recovered Joseph. The prisoner in a dungeon never longed more to see the sun. He has more than "a desire to depart and be with Christ;" his soul "thirsteth for God, for the living God." Like David, he thinks of him with a holy impatience. "When," he says, "shall I come and appear before God?"

And this too is *what Christ himself desires*. Were he God only, we should hardly dare to use language like this; but he is man as well as God, and when he took our nature with him into heaven, he took with him there feelings and desires cor-

responding with many of our own. There is sympathy between him and his people. There is a oneness of feeling between them, only the feelings of his soul are deeper and stronger than ours. Do we long to see him? We may be sure then that he longs for us to see him. With a rapturous joy shall we look on his face, but not with that joy, that exceeding joy, with which he will look on ours. We deem it the perfection of a creature's happiness to behold his glory; he deems it the perfection of his own divine happiness to have his people with him where he is, and to shew them his glory.

This also is *what he has promised his servants*. He holds it out to them as the one great recompence of their earthly services; "If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there also shall my servant be." He calls on them to be watchful and prayerful in his service, that they may be accounted "worthy" hereafter "to stand before the Son of Man."

And this too is *one great end why he became the Son of Man*, why he took our nature upon him and embodied himself in our form. Before, he was the invisible God; no one had seen him or could see him; but to redeem his people from their iniquities and afterwards to reveal himself to them, to dwell among them visibly in heaven, and thus increase their happiness by allowing them to behold him there, he prepared himself a body. He is now "God manifest in the flesh," and the fact of his being so assures us, that when we are where his glorified body is, we shall see him. We shall "behold his face in righteousness." "We shall see him as he is."

How delightful, we sometimes think, must it have been for the Jewish high priest to go into the holy of holies in the temple, and, as he sprinkled the blood on the mercy-seat and the incense smoked, to look up and to behold him who sat between the cherubim there, shining forth as though conscious of his presence and well pleased with his services! Well, says this text to us, when you are in heaven, you shall go into the holy of holies. Your service there shall not be confined to the outer court; it shall not be like that of the common priests who might go no farther than into the holy place; you shall go and go when you will into the holiest of all. When you minister, it shall be before the mercy-seat. "Before the throne," within sight of God and the Lamb—that, this apostle says in another place, is the station of the redeemed who "serve him day and

night in his temple." Or we may change the metaphor. Here our service is not in the King's palace. It is in his vineyard, and that lying in a distant part of his dominions. He comes, he says, and overlooks us, but we do not see him come; he speaks not a word to us; he holds no visible intercourse with us. Hereafter he will take us from his vineyard to his house. No more out-door servants, we shall serve him in his glorious palace; and not there only, but in "the presence of his glory" there. We shall be his most favoured, his personal attendants. Once far off from him, far as creatures can be, we shall be brought nigh, and nigh as any creature can be brought, to his lofty throne.

Now, brethren, if you have any Christian feeling in your hearts, you will not require to be told that this will heighten to you heaven's happiness. You feel that it will constitute one main part of heaven's happiness; that nothing even there can be comparable to this. This puts a glory on heaven's glory. Without it, heaven would be to us as a palace without a king in it, or a firmament without a sun.

And to this sight of Christ in heaven, we may trace partly the excellence of that service we shall offer him there. What is it, Christian brethren, that often makes our worship here so languid? It is a want of this. We do not see the Saviour we are worshipping, and we have not faith enough, or our faith is not active enough, to make us alive to his presence without our seeing it. When we pray to him, we have no sensible evidence that he hears us; and when we praise him, we do not know that he listens to us. We are in the outer court. Between us and the shining of his countenance, there is veil after veil. Imagine then all those veils rent asunder; conceive of him for a moment as becoming visible to you here while you pray to him, and as smiling on you when you praise him; and then when you go away and try to serve him in the world, think of him as drawing near and saying to you often in your labours of love, "Good and faithful servant of mine, well done"—would not your prayers be more earnest, and your praises more fervent, and your labours more zealous? Transfer this to heaven. We shall see his face there, and that bright vision will be ever quickening our love for him, and deepening our thankfulness, and bringing us better acquainted with his glorious perfections, and thus ever prompting us to new and higher efforts of adora-

tion. It will keep our happy spirits in full activity and vigour, and not wear them out while it does so, but sustain them, and strengthen them, and expand them, and make them capable of yet higher efforts and nobler adoration. "The joy of the Lord" shall then indeed be "our strength." His servants shall indeed serve him, for "they shall see his face."

IV. There is one thing more in the text—*the mark the Lord puts on these happy servants*, a mark of honour with which he distinguishes them. He stamps his name on them; "His name shall be in their foreheads."

Several times before in this book, language like this occurs. Once in the third chapter. Speaking of "him that overcometh," "I will write upon him," the Lord Jesus says, "the name of my God; I will write upon him my new name." And again, in the fourteenth chapter, John says, "I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred, forty, and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." In the seventh chapter, he speaks of "the servants of our God, who are sealed in their foreheads." Just as we write our name on any thing or seal it with our seal, to let others know that it is ours, so will Christ own his people in heaven; he will write his name on them and write it conspicuously, as though he delighted to own them.

To understand this, we must recollect that the name of God often signifies his perfections or character. It bears this meaning because his perfections are peculiar to him and distinguish him from all others, as our names distinguish or identify us: we are known by them. For any one then to have God's name on him, is to have the same character as God, to bear a resemblance to him, to have what we call his image and likeness. And all God's servants even on earth are thus distinguished. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ," we read, "he is none of his." When we become his, there is a conformity to Christ wrought in us by the power of the Holy Ghost, and this is Christ's mark or name upon us. But then here this mark is often scarcely visible. This conformity to Christ is imperfect, and it is marred by our many infirmities. It is like an inscription on a monumental column obscurely written, or half-defaced, and covered too with weeds and sand. The ordinary traveller passes by and never sees it. None but he who is looking for such

inscriptions, discovers it. Thus our relation to Christ as his people and servants, is now in a great measure hidden. The new name is given when the white stone of absolution is given, but "no man knoweth it saving he that receiveth it." But in heaven, says the text, this name shall be "in our foreheads." The meaning is, our relation to Christ shall be open and apparent. Every one who sees us, shall see that we are his servants, and see it by discovering in us readily and at once our resemblance to him. There will be an outward conformity to him on us, as well as a spiritual conformity to him within us. We shall wear the same form, as well as have the same heart. We shall be changed into his glorious image; and this will let angels and archangels know, and all the creatures in the universe, whose we are and whom we serve. Thus St. Paul speaks in Romans viii. of a "manifestation" or discovery "of the sons of God," which is to take place in heaven, and how is this to be brought about? He has just told us in the preceding verse—by a glory which is to be "revealed in them," by an excellency imparted to them and shining forth. And St. John in one of his epistles, not only connects, as here, this visible resemblance to Christ with the sight of him, he makes it the consequence of a sight of him; "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

Will this blessedness, brethren, ever rest on you and me? Shall we be among these happy men who thus serve the Lord in heaven, and see his face, and have his name on them? I know not your feelings when a question like this is asked you, but I know what those of a minister of Christ might be as he stands here and asks it. "O what matters it to this people what heaven is, if they are never to be there? Why describe to them a world which they have never been taught to seek? There are those on your right hand and on your left, who are getting farther and farther from heaven every year they live, and caring less for it." And then comes this thought into such a minister's mind—"I will never preach of heaven again. I will speak only of the world and its vanity, of sin and its misery, of death and its nearness, of judgment and its awfulness, of hell and its terrors." Of these things you have heard nothing to-day, but let me tell you before you leave these doors, they are as real as though every sermon you heard were con-

cerning them, and every friend you met spoke to you of them. No matter what heaven is, if you are the world's slaves or the slaves of sin, you will never see it. All the happiness you will ever know, you will have in this world; yes, in this dreary world in which hitherto you have sought so much and found so little. You will soon die, and be lost to happiness for ever.

I have preached this sermon to help a few here who are really going to heaven, to forget for an hour their cares and troubles in the way to it; and to stir them up to think more of their heavenly home, and look more closely at it, and seek to be better fitted for it. I may have failed in this object. Those men may go away as burdened and cast down as they came. But if, through God's mighty grace, some one here who is not in the way to heaven, should be led to-day to stop and ask himself whither he is going; to enquire, if he does not serve Christ in eternity, what he shall do there; if he does not see his face, what he shall see; if he is not like him, whom he shall be like; and if that man should go home, and fly to his chamber, and fall down before God, and for the first time in his life supplicate his mercy, this would be better than as though every heir of heaven in this place went away rejoicing. Brethren, there are some of you whom those that preach to you, would delight to comfort, but we would pass you by and gladly, if we could but strike home to the hearts of others sitting by your side; if we could but make them feel that they have sins to be pardoned and immortal souls to be saved. O to be the instrument in God's hand of making the slave of Satan the servant of Christ! Pray for your ministers that this happiness may be theirs. You could not ask for them, or your neighbours, or yourselves, a higher blessing.

SERMON XLVIII.

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE TEN LEPERS.

ST. LUKE XVII. 15, 16.—“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks.”

AMONG the peculiar blessings we enjoy in this country, there is one we seldom think of till we have been in other countries. I allude to our freedom from those loathsome diseases with which many other lands are afflicted. Think for instance of Switzerland. The traveller admires its beautiful vallies, and gazes with wonder on its magnificent mountains, but he can traverse scarcely a mile of either without being pained to the very soul by the maladies of its inhabitants. The chapter before us places us in Palestine, at the entrance of one of its villages; and what does it shew us there? Not one man, but ten men in one company all lepers, all suffering from a hideous disease of which we in this country know nothing. Thankfulness then for something like a great national mercy, is one thing taught us by this scripture. But there is a leprosy of the soul as well as of the body, and we do know here what this is. We are all afflicted with it, and have been ever since we were born. God grant that before we die, we may all seek and find that great remedy which only can heal it!

We may divide the history before us into four parts—the application of these men to our Lord for relief, the cure they received, the thankfulness of one of them, and the unthankfulness of all the rest.

I. *Their application* appears to have been *unanimous*. The whole ten sought at once relief, and relief from the same quar-

ter. They all joined in one common prayer to our Lord, crying with one voice, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

And it was *earnest*. "They lifted up their voices" as they made it, shewing that they were extremely anxious for relief, and determined, if possible, to obtain it.

It was also *respectful* and *humble*. They "stood afar off." The law indeed required them as lepers to keep separate from others, but they might have said, "We may disregard the law in this case. That merciful Jesus is not like other men; he will allow any one to approach him. And the nearer we get to him, the more likely we shall be to arrest his attention and to succeed." But they did not approach him. They treated him with as much respect, as though he had been the severest, rather than the kindest being in the world.

Would, brethren, that this congregation were like this company of afflicted men! We should be so, if we felt our disease as they felt theirs. Their leprosy had disfigured them, had polluted them; it had cut them off from all society except with miserable beings like themselves; it had excluded them from the city, and temple, and special presence, of their God. They knew this and felt this. It was their consciousness of this and their misery under it, which led them with one heart and voice so earnestly to implore Christ's mercy. And did we know what mischief sin has done us, how it has tainted, deformed, and degraded our souls, robbing us of all the higher blessings of our nature, cutting us off from the communion of holy and happy creatures, and worse still, banishing us from all fellowship with our God—did we understand and really feel this, I could tell you, brethren, what in one instant would be the consequence—there would go up from every heart here piercing the heavens, just that prayer, that united, earnest, humble prayer, which burst forth from these men in Samaria, "Jesus, Lord, have mercy on us." Turn to your prayer-books. We say there in our general confession, "There is no health in us," we are all diseased and thoroughly diseased men; and what are we taught to say the very next moment? "O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders."

II. We may look at *the cure these men received*. And here we shall find something to admire both in the men themselves and also in our Lord.

Turn, first, to *our Lord*.

Here is a wonderful manifestation of his power. We generally speak of this as one miracle; it was rather ten miracles performed in one and the same moment. These lepers were all cleansed, and cleansed, not one after another, but together: they all shared in the same instant the same great mercy. And this reminds us of the apostle's words, "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." He is a rich Saviour, rich in mercy and rich in power. Were we all this moment to call upon him, he could shew mercy to us all as easily as to one, and as much mercy to us all as though he had to help only one. His blood is powerful enough to cleanse us all, his grace abundant enough to sanctify and comfort us all, his strength mighty enough to keep us all, his heart large enough to love us all, and his heaven spacious enough to receive us all. We call him a great Saviour and a mighty Saviour, but he is more—he is an omnipotent, infinite Saviour. "He is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him." A universe of praying sinners could not exhaust his power to save. He could save and he could satisfy them to the full, and yet still be able to save and satisfy millions more, "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

And turn from our Lord to *the imploring men before him*. Their conduct corresponds beautifully with his greatness.

To understand it, you must remember that whenever a leper was healed, he was required by the Jewish law to go immediately to one of the priests, that the reality of his cure might be ascertained and certain sacrifices and offerings made for him. The command therefore of Christ to these lepers, must have been a severe trial of their faith and obedience. "Go shew yourselves unto the priests"—it was like telling them with their miserable disease still upon them, that they were healed men, and bidding them act as such. And they did act as such. "We dare not go," they might have said, "in a condition like this. The priests will think we are mocking them." But with a child-like faith and a child-like obedience they did as they were commanded, and they had their reward, an immediate reward; "it came to pass that as they went, they were cleansed."

And thus does the Lord our Saviour always honour sooner or later a simple faith in him, and that simple obedience to him to

which such a faith leads. These things are the sure way to every mercy. Are we seeking of him the healing of a diseased soul? longing to be saved by him from the guilt and power of sin? All we need for our healing, is to take him simply at his word; to cast all reasoning aside, and to seek his salvation through the means he prescribes to us. Does he say, "Believe and be saved?" We must not stop to ask how faith can save us; we must not begin to tell him of our unworthiness and our unfitness for salvation. Our answer must rather be, "O let me believe, that I may be saved. Lord, help me to believe. Enable me to take thy much needed, thy longed for mercy, as freely as thou dost offer it."

And acting thus we are sometimes astonished to find what a speedy way this proves to the blessing we are seeking. "We shall be healed perhaps when we get to the priests," these lepers might say; but they were healed on the road, before they came near the priests. So the Lord often surprises the sinner, the willing and obedient sinner, by overtaking him, as it were, with his mercy. The man is looking for it at some distant period, but he finds to his wonder and joy, that it is already his. Some of you perhaps can look back to a time, when, wretched with a sense of guilt, you resolved to seek of a bleeding Saviour pardon and consolation. You heard the command, "Look unto me and be ye saved," and "We will look," you said; "and we will hope that before we die pardon and salvation may be ours;" but what followed? In some happy moment, long before you anticipated, almost before you imagined you had cast one real look on that Saviour, you discovered that he was your Saviour. You could scarcely believe it, but you felt, like these lepers, that as you went, you were cleansed.

III. We come next to *the thankfulness manifested by one of these healed men*. It is described in the text; "When he saw that he was healed, he turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks"—a beautiful picture of genuine Christian thankfulness, of that thankfulness which distinguishes a cleansed, pardoned sinner from every other being in the world.

"When he saw that he was healed, he turned back." His thankfulness therefore was *prompt*. It was felt and manifested at once. "You are sent to the priests," the others might have

told him, and perhaps did tell him: "go to them first. The law requires it; that great Jesus who has healed us, has bidden it." But the man's heart was too full for this. His misery could not make him unmindful of ceremony, but mercy does. He breaks away from his companions, and comes at once to our Lord.

And it was a *warm, hearty, earnest* thankfulness, that he manifested. It was like his prayer. He had before lifted up his voice as he cried for mercy, he now lifts it up again as he gives praise for mercy; "With a loud voice he glorified God." Shall we say that he had caught already the fervour of heaven? Again and again we are told in the book of Revelation, that it is with "a loud voice," with all the energy of their burning souls, that the redeemed there praise and adore. Real praise is no cold, formal, decent thing; it is a glowing thing, one of the strongest and liveliest emotions the human soul knows.

And this leper's thankfulness was *humble* and *reverential*, more so, observe, than even his prayer. When he cried for mercy, he stood; when he gives thanks for mercy, he falls down on his face.

Here again is the spirit of heaven. In the seventh chapter of the Revelation, the angels are described as "standing round about the throne," but now the song of blessing and thanksgiving is about to burst from them, and where are they? They are no longer standing, they are fallen "before the throne on their faces, worshipping God."

And here is one of the mysteries of heartfelt religion. You must feel this, brethren, before you can understand it. To tell you that a consciousness of guilt and unworthiness humbles the soul, is to tell you nothing strange. You see that it must be so. But we can tell you that a consciousness of mercy, of pardoning, healing mercy, humbles the soul ten-fold more. It melts a man's heart within him. "She stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet;" and why? Because she was a sinner and wanted forgiveness? No, because she was a sinner and had found forgiveness. This woman had tasted of pardoning love, and that had thus softened, humbled, and melted her. "I am the chief of sinners," said Paul; and when did he say so? When he was struck to the ground on the road to Damascus, and was imploring with terror the

persecuted Saviour's mercy? It was when he knew that he had "obtained mercy;" when the grace of that Saviour had been "exceeding abundant" towards him, and made him a wonder and "a pattern" of mercy to the whole church. Can you understand this, brethren? Then bless God that you can. It is his distinguishing grace, that has enabled you to understand it. We must not put a feeling like this on a par with a holy and heavenly life as an evidence of our personal religion, but an abiding feeling like this will perhaps seldom or never be found except in connection with a holy and heavenly life. The man who has it within him, will have much more within him, that savours of heaven. We may say of such a man with little risk of mistake, he is not far from the kingdom of God.

The thankfulness of this man was *elevated* also. It was accompanied with high thoughts of God, and a setting forth, as far as he was able, of God's glory. He is said in the text to have "glorified God."

And observe how he blends together in his thankfulness God and Christ. He glorifies the one, and at the same time he falls down before the other, giving him thanks. Did he then look on our Lord in his real character, as God? Perhaps he did. The wonderful cure he had received in his body, might have been accompanied with as wonderful an outpouring of grace and light into his mind. It might have made him feel that his great Healer was a far higher being than he had before considered him, none other than the incarnate Jehovah. But let this have been as it may, God and Christ, God's glory and Christ's mercy, were so blended together in his mind, that he could not separate them. Neither, brethren, can you separate them, if you know any thing aright of Christ and his mercy. Whatever mercy the Lord Jesus shews you, will be sure to enlarge your views of God's glory. You will feel it to be godlike mercy; and you will feel too that he who has given it you and made it yours, take what form he may, though he trod our world as the Son of Man and appears now in heaven as the Son of Man, is and must be none other than the living God. Your soul will rise up to contemplate and adore him as such. You will delight in his Godhead and greatness. Were you able, you would make his name glorious through all the world. "He glorified God"—never deem your thankfulness genuine till it takes this lofty character; till you see and shew that the mer-

cies you are thankful for, come from Jehovah, and bear on them the stamp of his majesty and love.

IV. We must pass on now to our last point—*the unthankfulness of the other lepers.*

The man we have been looking at, is called “a Samaritan” and “a stranger.” He was not exactly a heathen, but he belonged to a people whom the Jews regarded as little better than heathens. They were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” had no share in its peculiar privileges, and had often mingled the worship of idols with that of the true God. When therefore we see this man thus full of grateful feelings at the Redeemer’s feet, we may well ask with our Lord, Where are his companions? “Where are the nine?” They were probably all Jews, all superior in spiritual advantages to this Samaritan, but where are they? They are healed and gone, gone without one word of thankfulness to him who has healed them. While this stranger is glorifying God and adoring Christ, they are on their way to the priests, performing a few heartless ceremonies perhaps for a little while with them in the temple, and then hurrying home to their families and friends, forgetting their Benefactor, or if not forgetting him, putting off their acknowledgments to him, contenting themselves with saying, “We will go and thank him another day.” How mournful was this, and yet how common is it!

We have just been looking at a picture of a real Christian, a man of God. He is a rare character, one of ten. We have now before us a picture of the world at large, the Christian world, of those who profess to know Christ, and to have sought and found his mercy. Well may we say again, it is a mournful picture.

There is amazing ingratitude, brethren, in the human heart. It is one of the last things that give way before the grace of God. Men seem as though they could do any thing, rather than be really thankful when God is their Benefactor. They will seek Christ or appear to seek him; when in fear or suffering, they will lift up their voice like these lepers, and cry for his mercy; in prayer and earnestness, they will seem for a time all that sinful, perishing creatures should be: but they cannot be got farther. Nothing can make them thankful. When God is to be glorified and the blessed Jesus praised, the difference between them and the real Christian becomes manifest—they

have the world to serve ; they have self to indulge ; the Samaritan may turn aside to shew his thankfulness to his Lord, but not they. Brethren, have you passed this turning point ? I am not asking you now whether you have felt your misery as sinners, and sought of Christ mercy. This you may have done or think you have done. But I ask, what power has mercy over you ? Has it softened you, humbled you, made you inwardly, deeply thankful ? Has it so warmed your hearts, that, let what will stand in the way, you must get out of the crowd to give thanks to your Saviour and glorify your God ? Are you singular in the world ? singular, not for the religious profession you make or the religious privileges you enjoy, but for your readiness to lay down yourselves and all you possess at your Saviour's feet, to consecrate all you have and are to your Saviour's glory ? You may tell me that this is taking very lofty ground : but, beloved brethren, we must take lofty ground, if we would be the true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a lofty Saviour, and has prepared for his people a lofty world. You and I must get something like a lofty spirit, if we expect to see his face or dwell in his world. It is useless to say, "We are all unthankful ; the Lord pardon us." If we continue unthankful, the Lord will not pardon us." What does he say of the heathen ? "They are without excuse ;" and why without excuse ? "Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." He notices the thanklessness of the very heathen, of strangers, and condemns them for it. How will he ever look over the unthankfulness of those who call themselves his servants and his children ?

And here the heart of the real Christian smites him. He hears of thankfulness, but "Where," he says, "is my thankfulness ?" He looks at this cleansed leper prostrate in fervent thanksgiving before his Lord, and "Who and what am I ?" he says again. "That man's mercies are nothing compared with mine, and yet how great the difference between him and me ! His praise seems to come from him as though it must come, as though he could not restrain it ; whereas mine will scarcely come at all. I am often cold as a stone towards the blessed Jesus, and generally the praise I offer him, is an attempt at praise, rather than any thing else. It is only at intervals and those of short continuance, that my soul really magnifies the Lord my Saviour." And it is well, brethren, to be thus reminded of our

strange insensibility. It makes us feel anew our utter sinfulness, and this feeling brings us anew to Christ for pardon and cleansing. Again the prayer goes up, "Jesus, Lord, have mercy on us;" and then comes again a sense of his pardoning mercy, and with it comes the warm and praising heart. We are kept from going away with the nine. We may not be all that this thankful Samaritan was, but like him we are willing to separate ourselves from others that we may glorify Christ; we feel that whatever others do, we must glorify him; and ask us what we long for most, it is for that happy hour when we shall indeed fall down on our face at his feet, giving him thanks.

SERMON XLIX.

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

DAVID'S CONFIDENCE IN THE PROSPECT OF THE
FUTURE.

PSALM XXIII. 1—"I shall not want."

SIMPLE as these words are, how few of us could feelingly utter them! They indicate a state of mind, for which our hearts often and greatly long, but which we find hard to attain, and when attained, harder still to keep—a being careful for nothing, a state of quietness and repose. And this tranquillity goes through the whole psalm. The man who wrote it, seems to have been without an anxiety or a fear. "I shall not want," he says at first; and then a little after, "I will fear no evil;" and then again, "I shall never be forsaken. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

I need not say that this is a happy frame of mind. There is no real happiness for us in any other. The only question is, Where does it come from? How may we get it? The psalm

will tell us. It lays open the thoughts and feelings which were in David's mind when David said, "I shall not want," and thus discloses to us in those thoughts and feelings, the secret springs of that composure which he enjoyed. May God grant that in contemplating the peace of his soul, our own souls may find peace! Some of us greatly desire this blessing, and there is this fact for our encouragement—this scripture was written to communicate it. It was written, not to save the soul, but to quiet it; not to carry it to a world of glory, but to ease it of its burdens and make it happy in a world of misery.

Our subject then is repose of mind as to the future, a freedom from cares and anxieties; and not the nature or advantages of this, but simply its grounds. The psalmist seems to have had three of these in his mind at this time.

I. The first he mentions, is *the relation in which the great Jehovah stands to him.*

We generally say that the promises of God are the grounds of our expectations from God, and so they are; but put faith into vigorous exercise, and it seems as though it could stand for a while without a direct promise. It brings hope into the soul, by presenting God before the soul in the relation which he is pleased to bear towards it, and then telling it that he will be to it all that this relation implies; thus causing it to trust even in a silent God, to feel itself safe and happy in his hands, before he gives it one promise or utters one word to make it so. Look at the forty-eighth psalm. "This God is our God for ever and ever," says the exulting church; and then mark the conclusion she immediately draws—"he will be our Guide even unto death." And hear Jeremiah; "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him."

Now it is precisely in this way that David's faith works in the outset of this peaceful psalm. "I shall not want," he says, and why does he say so? Doubtless because, in some way or other, he has taken up the idea that God will not suffer him to want: he expects provision from him, a full supply of all his necessities both of body and of soul. But whence has he got this expectation? On what does he build it? He comes to it at once; not, as at other times, by calling to mind some faithful promise of Jehovah's lips, but simply from the recollection of

the connection which exists between Jehovah and himself. "The Lord is my Shepherd," he says one moment, and then the next, as though this were enough, he adds, "I shall not want. My Shepherd will act towards me a Shepherd's part. He will supply all my need. No one thing that is good, will he withhold from me. I am his and he is mine, and that contents me."

Here then is one great source of mental quietness—a looking on God as actually sustaining those characters towards us, which he says he sustains, possessing many of the feelings they imply and doing their work. But in order to this, two things are needful.

First, *a view of God as a gracious God.*

This the psalmist had evidently attained, for mark the holy confidence, we might almost say, the holy boldness, of his language. The angels in heaven would scarcely use it. As they surround the throne of Jehovah, they call him "the Lord God omnipotent," "the holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts;" but here in this fallen world comes a mortal man, a mean, polluted, despicable worm, and looking up to this same exalted Being, sees him, as it were, in a human form, and gives him a human name; he calls him a Shepherd, and not the Shepherd of the hosts of heaven, sustaining this character amongst pure and glorious creatures, but the Shepherd of a worthless sinner in a worthless world.

We come then at once to this conclusion—before we can repose in God, we must know him as a gracious God, and gracious to sinners. We must make such a discovery of his character, as will not leave one hard thought of him in our minds; such as will represent him to us as merciful, and kind, and approachable, willing to be our friend, and well pleased with us when we treat him as our friend. And no where can a sinner make this discovery of him, but in that manifestation which he has given us of himself in and through his incarnate Son. Away from Christ, there is no comfort, no repose, in our thoughts of God, except indeed that which comes from erroneous thoughts of him. Of this there is more than enough in the world. But once open a man's eyes, let him once see something of the greatness, and majesty, and purity, of him with whom he has to do, and then he must look at him in the flesh, in the condescending and suffering and dying Jesus, before he

can venture near him, or know in fact one feeling of hope or peace.

And another thing is needful—*we must know this gracious God to be our God.*

The psalmist, you observe, uses what is called the language of appropriation. He does not, like the dying Jacob, call the Lord “the Shepherd of Israel;” or like Peter, “the Shepherd and Bishop of souls:” he says, and says it as though he had been accustomed to say it, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I can look up to him as mine.” And this connecting of a gracious God with ourselves, is necessary for us before we can have any abiding peace in him. A believing view of God as in Christ Jesus a gracious God, will, I know, save my guilty soul when I die; but it will not of itself quiet my troubled spirit while I live. I must see his favour and mercy reaching to me, his peculiar mercy, the favour he bears to his chosen. I must feel myself to be an object of it, embraced by it, under its influence and operation; and then I can rest; then I can say, “Abba, Father;” then I know I am safe. Place me then in the wildest desert on the globe, amidst perils out of number, in desolation and darkness, do with me what you will, I can say, and say it with as much confidence—blessed be God!—as though I were in heaven, “I will fear no evil; I shall not want.” How can I? There is the omnipotent God my Shepherd to protect me, and there is the same God, with all his riches in glory, my Shepherd to feed me.

II. *The presence of God with him* was another ground of the psalmist’s quietness at this time; “I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.”

We all know that God is every where present, but it is amazing how little we think of his presence. It is at once a part and a proof of our natural ungodliness, that, till our hearts are renewed, we habitually forget it. We live and feel as though God were far away. But when a man really becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus, he begins to feel himself for the first time in the presence of the living God. The truth he before knew and forgot, he now cannot forget; it assumes a startling importance in his eyes. A part of the grace he has received consists in his lively impression of it. Do you ask who is a godly man? I answer, he who habitually moves about the earth with this thought in his mind, “Thou, O God, seest me.

I am in Jehovah's presence. The God who made me, is near me."

At first this thought excites in him perhaps pain and terror. He had rather God were not near him. He is ready to say to him with the frightened Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He feels in God's presence as a criminal feels in the presence of his judge. But when the man begins to acquire a knowledge of God as a gracious God, and begins to hope that he is or may be gracious to him; when his faith gains confidence, and he can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd;" then none but the man himself can tell how he rejoices in the fact that before terrified him. "My Shepherd," he says, "is not one far away from me; one whom I have to call from a distance when the storm overtakes me on the bleak mountain, or the torrent comes rushing down in the dark valley, or when I am faint with hunger in the barren wilderness; he is ever by my side, he never leaves or forsakes me. Whither shall I go from his Spirit, or whither shall I flee from his presence? I can go and flee no where, and no where do I wish to flee. It is my comfort and strength to believe him near me, and it is the highest earthly joy my soul knows to feel him near. When my foolish heart tells me he is gone from me, I become a fearful and troubled man."

And the Lord encourages this feeling in his people. He often appeals to it. His presence, he tells them, may well tranquillize them. "Fear thou not," he says, "for I am with thee." And the blessed Jesus also does the same. Touchingly indeed does he let us see that he understands well the quietness his presence gives. His disciples were sorrowful, for they were going to lose him; the hour of his last agony and death was coming on; and what does he say to them? He can think of no greater comfort for them in their sorrow, than the prospect of seeing him again. "I will not leave you comfortless," he says, "I will come to you. Ye now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice." And think of the last words that proceeded from his sacred lips as he left the earth. They were words that correspond exactly to these words of David; "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Go ye now and preach my gospel to all nations. Every where shall men hate you and persecute you; every where shall you have tribulation; but here is consolation for you and conso-

lation enough—I will be every where with you. You may think of me, not as far off, but as present with you, as really present with you as you see me now.”

And cannot you understand this, brethren? What infant fears in its mother’s arms? What child is greatly afraid by a father’s side? What good soldier shrinks when he sees his general at his right hand as the foe comes on? And what enemy, or danger, or want, or sorrow, appals you, when you can look upwards and say to the great Shepherd of souls, “Thou art with us?” when you can look around you and say, “The Lord is here?” O the comfort the presence even of an earthly friend sometimes gives us in pain or sorrow! How tranquil the mind becomes in the consciousness that he is and will be near us! But what is this to the presence of an infinitely tender and powerful God? “I have set the Lord always before me,” said David; “because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.” Nothing dismays this man. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” he says again, “I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

III. Let us come now to a third spring of his serenity. This we find to be *his present mercies*.

He does not tell us what these mercies were. It is evident however that he had not mainly, if at all, in his mind any earthly good, the crown he wore or the worldly prosperity he enjoyed. His thoughts are soaring far above all these empty shews of happiness. They are settling on those more precious mercies which he enjoyed when a shepherd boy on the hills of Bethlehem, as richly perhaps and sweetly as on the throne of Israel. He has spiritual blessings in his mind; spiritual provisions—those supplies of strength and consolation for the soul, which carry it onwards and refresh it in the way to heaven; and spiritual pleasures—the joys which flow into the soul from communion with heaven, from the contemplation of God and intercourse with him. Of these blessings it seems as though, in the fulness of his heart, he hardly knows how to speak.

He notices, first, *their abundance*; “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.”

The pastures he feeds in, are not rugged mountains or parched up deserts, affording here and there dry and scanty

herbage; they are meadows green as with one eternal spring, covered with verdure, and that verdure of the sweetest and most nourishing kind—"new every morning," "green pastures," or, as the words are translated in the margin, "pastures of tender grass."

And in these he "lies down." He feeds in them without toil or labour. They satisfy too while they support him. He lies down in them without one desire of seeking elsewhere better or more abundant food.

And then he notices *the safety with which he enjoys these mercies.*

Can earthly pleasures be so enjoyed? Let those say, who have experienced the most of them. Are they not all perilous to the soul? and are not the most delightful of them the most perilous? I allude not to gross pleasures. Take those which seem the farthest removed from grossness, the most refined pleasures of the understanding, and the sweetest and least sensual pleasures of the heart. Is there one among them all, which you can enjoy without danger, or one which you can open your heart to without fear? But turn to spiritual pleasures. "He leadeth me," says David, "beside the still waters."

Sheep are every where helpless animals, and especially so in water. Hence it frequently happens that those very streams which fertilize the pastures they feed in, become, by their rapidity or sudden overflowing, the causes of their destruction. But the waters that refresh the fold of God, are not waters of this dangerous character; not torrents which may burst their banks and sweep away the flock in their violence, they are gentle streams, such as may be approached without danger and dwelt by without fear. They are "still waters" or, as the margin calls them, "waters of quietness."

How peaceful must have been David's mind at this time, for images of this quiet character so readily to enter it! to enter it, mark, not on the sides of Carmel or on the banks of Jordan, but in Jerusalem and on a throne, amid the turmoil of a crowded city and the anxieties of a crown.

And he still goes on—he speaks in the fifth verse of *the strange circumstances under which these mercies are enjoyed*; "Thou preparest a table before me"—feedest me with this safe and abundant food—where? In the most unlikely spot that could be selected—"in the presence of mine enemies," in the

very thick of dangers, on the battle-field, amid toil and conflict, in a situation where nothing was to be expected but apprehension and alarm, and nothing hoped for but at the best preservation.

And where, brethren, are your spiritual consolations found and enjoyed? Surely there is something marvellous in their being enjoyed at all in a world like this, and in such hearts as ours. When we look around us and behold the sin and misery which cover the earth; when we think of our friends and neighbours, and recollect the sorrows some of them are enduring, or something worse—the sorrows many of them appear determined to venture on in an eternal world; and then when our thoughts turn inward, and we think of what we have been and what we are, how unholy our lives and how tainted even to the core our hearts, how base our ingratitude to the Saviour who has bled for us, and how frequent and shameful our cleaving to evil lusts and an evil world; and then too when we think of our spiritual foes, the lost spirits that unseen surround us, that are every moment aiming to throw within us the elements of pollution and to pierce us through with sorrows—if there is a marvel in the universe, it is the existence in our world of one happy heart or one throb of joy. Sometimes cast down, sometimes weeping—wonder at this, brethren? Rather wonder that you are not weeping every hour, that every breath you draw is not a sigh, that every bed you lie on is not watered with your tears. You are in a desert waste and barren, and yet you are often gathering in it heavenly fruits. The darkness of midnight is around you; but there is a light often shining on your head, a light cheering and gladdening like the light which shines around the throne of God.

The truth is, “when God giveth quietness,” none “then can make trouble.” It is not in the power of Satan or the world to disturb the joy he puts into the soul. “A stranger doth not intermeddle with it.” “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. My enemies see my blessedness, but they cannot rob me of it, they cannot mar it.”

And yet further—the psalmist speaks of *the honour which the Lord puts on him while blessing him*; “Thou anointest my head with oil.”

You are aware that in eastern countries, when the master of a feast wished to treat a guest with more than usual respect, he poured on his head a fragrant oil. Our Lord was thus anointed

in the pharisee's house by the woman who had been a sinner, and again at Bethany by the beloved Mary. Here then David means to say, that his God did more than supply his wants and fill up all the capacities of happiness within him; he made the provision and the joy he gave him honourable to him; as he expresses it in another psalm, he "beautified" him with salvation.

A sinner's happiness is God's glory, for it manifests his love and magnifies his power; and it is the sinner's glory, for it marks him out as a creature distinguished of God, selected out of a crowded universe as one whom he delights to honour, and in whose happiness he takes special pleasure. The angel is happy in a world of happiness, breathing the air of joy; the redeemed sinner is made happy in a world of misery, amid sufferings and griefs. The Lord, as it were, goes out of his way to bless him, he leaves his accustomed path to give him joy.

We have thus glanced at these four circumstances in David's mercies—their abundance, their safe nature, the strangeness of the situation in which they were enjoyed, and the honour connected with them. And now to make these mercies bear on our subject, quietness of heart, we must notice the manner in which the psalmist begins and ends the mention of them. "I shall not want," he says, "not want in the days to come;" and then he proceeds to tell us what he possesses now; and when he can go no further in the enumeration of his blessings, when his soul overflows, and he is obliged to sum up all and say, "My cup runneth over, I have more than I can enjoy," what does he add? He draws an inference that is precisely the same in its import, as the inference he drew at first from the Lord's relation to him; "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." There must then have been some connection in his mind between his present mercies and future mercies, he must have regarded the former as forerunners and pledges of the latter. "The Lord my Shepherd is blessing me," he must have said, "signally blessing me. Such happiness as mine is not earth-born; it comes to me from heaven. And why is it sent down from heaven into my worthless soul? Doubtless to teach me how much my God can give, to discover to me the tenderness of my Shepherd's heart and the strength of my Shepherd's arm, to unfold to me his purposes of love, to tell me in every feeling of joy I experience, that he will be with me on earth and take me at last to heaven."

I do not mean that all present mercies are pledges of future mercies. Far from it. Mercy goes with thousands down to the grave, and there leaves them for ever. The world is full of mercies. Even the broad road to destruction, the pathway down to hell, is strewn with them. But these common mercies are not those referred to in this psalm. It speaks of spiritual blessings; mercies such as the world neither possesses nor knows of; mercies connected with the pardon of sin, the renewal of the heart, the elevation of the affections, a conversation in heaven, a walking with an unseen God. From these things flow holy consolations; pure, and deep, and heart-felt pleasures; pleasures which are in a great measure independent of worldly things, weaning the soul from them instead of attaching it to them, making it long for the work and blessedness of heaven and the presence and likeness of its Lord. Now, brethren, are such pleasures yours? Then you are warranted to infer that all things are yours. You are warranted to draw from your blessedness the same conclusion that David drew from his. When the Lord speaks peace to you in affliction, reveals himself to you in prayer, shines forth before you as you hear or read his word, bringing it home to your heart as though it were a special message to you from himself, when he meets you at his table and is known of you there in breaking of bread—then, I say and I may say it with confidence, you are warranted to exclaim with this happy psalmist, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” You may look beyond life and say again, “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” In your case, hope ought to spring out of enjoyment, quietness for the future out of present abundance.

And mark the strength of the psalmist’s language. He does not say that goodness and mercy will be found of him whenever he seeks them; he says, “They will follow, pursue me. I shall not be able to get away from them.” And he does not say this as though it were only a matter of hope with him, he speaks as though it were a matter of certainty; “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me.” O what a blessed confidence! Do you wish for it, Christian brethren? Then you may have it. A composed mind, a casting away of tormenting and depressing anxieties, a rolling of your burdens on the Lord—peace, rest, repose—this the Lord offers you. He offers it you now; not when your circumstances are altered, nor when this or that

cloud is removed, or this or that trial gone, or some blessing you long for is given, but now, in the presence of your enemies, in the midst of all the confusion around you, the darkness before you, and the turmoil within you. He says, "Come to me, and I will give it you." O go to him and take it. It flows out of a sense of reconciliation with him, a holy contemplation of him, a mindfulness of his presence, and, above all, a perception and enjoyment of his amazing goodness. The spiritual mercies he bestows are all connected. They are all glorious links in the same glorious chain—grace at one end, glory at the other; pardon here, heaven there; a broken heart at the beginning, a happy, satisfied heart at the end. To have one is sooner or later to have all; it is a pledge of all. "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him." If he has put his fear in you, his mercy will be everlasting upon you. He tells you so. He speaks to you from heaven and says, "I will never leave nor forsake thee." O let your answer be, "He never will forsake me. I shall not want. I will fear no evil. Surely goodness and mercy shall ever follow me. I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

SERMON L.

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

MAN'S NEED SUPPLIED FROM GOD'S RICHES.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 19.—"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus."

THIS, in the first instance, was the language of gratitude. It was drawn forth from the apostle by the kindness shewn him in a season of difficulty by the Philippian Christians. And it expresses most naturally the feelings of a holy soul under a sense of kindness. "I cannot recompense you," it says, "but that

gives me no pain—my God can, and my God will. Ye sent once and again unto my necessity ; my God will send to you in yours. He will supply all your need according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus.”

The first point we have to notice here is man's necessity ; the second, God's wealth ; and then a third, the supply the apostle anticipates for this necessity from this wealth.

I. We must look at *man's necessity*.

The apostle speaks of this as though in the case before him, it was extensive and great. “My God shall supply all your need,” he says, intimating that he knew there was much need among them to be supplied. And yet these were real Christians, men whom God had chosen and set apart for himself, enriched with many of the highest blessings he has to give, and destined for the highest happiness. But still they were in need, in great need ; and so, brethren, is every child of God, and so he must continue, as long as he continues at all in this present world. Every thing in it combines to render his case necessitous, and his wants urgent.

Strictly speaking, all the creatures that exist are equally indigent, no one more so than another. Whether sinners or saints, angels or men, we are in ourselves all alike poor, all alike dependent every moment on the hand that formed us. Out of God, there is not a particle of real self-sufficiency in the universe. But then circumstances, though they cannot add to our inherent emptiness or dependence, may add and add very materially to our necessities. And the people of God, while living here, are placed in exactly those circumstances which seem calculated to increase their necessities the most ; just as though God were determined to shew in their case in how much need he can support a creature, and what a rich supply he has for him in every exigency. Look at their situation.

There are three ways by which we can conceive it possible for the wants of a dependent creature to be increased. One is, *when he is placed in a situation unfavourable to his happiness* ; I mean, when he stands amidst outward difficulties or dangers ; where there is something to be removed or overcome, as well as something to be supplied, before he can be happy. An infant, for instance, in its mother's arms, is as needy in itself as want

and helplessness can render it, but take it from its mother and cast it into a raging sea, you add at once to its exigencies. It needs now to be rescued as well as nourished; it wants a deliverer as well as a mother.

And then again the need of a creature is yet further augmented, when in addition to these unfavourable circumstances from without, *there is something within itself counteracting its welfare*. A sick man wants more help than one in health; a man with a wounded spirit more comfort and solace than another man with a mind unwrung.

And in yet a third case the creature's need may be enlarged—*when he is destined for a high station or high enjoyments*. For example—a monarch's son requires more care and pains in his early training, than a peasant's child. Or take a barbarian—he does well enough in his native woods among his fellow-savages, but set him apart for a high state of civilization and refinement, and you have added to him at once many wants. You must communicate to him much knowledge, you must subject him to much discipline, you must labour on him a long time and in various ways, before you can enable him to enter into your pursuits or relish your enjoyments.

Now put these three things together, and then you will have a faint idea of the extent and urgency of the Christian's need in this evil world. We are not needy in a world of abundance and quiet, in a world the atmosphere of which breathes of happiness; we are needy in a situation most unfavourable to our happiness, our best and highest happiness—in a desert, barren and waste; and worse than this—in a desert where the sun scorches, and the hurricane sweeps, and the serpent stings, and the cruel Arab plunders and destroys.

And there is mischief within us too, for there is sin within us; an evil so great, that a dark hell itself could not inflict on us a greater. It does not know a greater. And this evil is deeply seated within us, and is always at work within us, and we have no power in ourselves to cast it out of us, and little or none even to moderate or control it.

And then, if we are the people of God, we are designed for a station as unlike our present, as a glorious heaven is unlike an accursed earth, and for pursuits and joys for which naturally we have no taste or desire; nay, we have no conception of them, no more than the deaf man has of music, or the blind man of a

rainbow, or the beast that perishes, of the soarings of the imagination or the expandings of intellect.

We are needy, first, not simply as creatures, but as creatures among dangers and without supplies; then we are needy as sinful creatures; and then as creatures redeemed and set apart for glory. We are, first, starving where there is no bread, naked where there is a scorching sun but no clothing, thirsty where there is no fountain; and then we are sick where there is no physician, wounded where we can have no cure, polluted where there is no cleansing stream, miserable where there is none to comfort—miserable in ourselves where all around us is misery; and, to complete the picture, we are beggars' sons appointed to sit on a monarch's throne; not worthy to walk this wretched earth, but destined to mount the skies; hungering now after the vilest husks, grovelling in our desires and appetites, feeding on ashes and scarcely caring for any thing better; but soon to feed with angels, to enter into heaven's pursuits and heaven's pleasures; to rise to a state of exaltation, beyond which there is no exaltation, to stand in Jehovah's presence, before his throne and his face, to wear his likeness and share his joy.

These are our circumstances, brethren; this is our need; at least, this is a part of it. May God grant that we may become more and more sensible of its extent and urgency! It is a serious thing to be thus needy and know ourselves to be so; but to be thus needy and know it not—what can be more dangerous? Ignorance like this is the ruin, it is the death, of the soul, and its ruin and death under the most mournful circumstances. It allows us to die for want in the desert, when God is opening fountains in the desert, and raining down bread from heaven all around us.

II. We may go on now to another part of the text—*God's wealth*. It ascribes to him, you observe, "riches," and these, "riches in glory."

Now the apostle has not in his mind, I conceive, all the blessings which God possesses in himself, but those blessings in particular, which are adapted to our present state of want and our future state of exaltation. He means what we emphatically call gospel blessings, and what he himself calls in another place "the riches of God's grace." They comprehend all those un-

speakably great mercies which are offered to sinners in and through the Lord Jesus, and many of which have been provided especially for sinners and are peculiar to them—blessings which find man sunk to the very bottom of the rational creation, and so exalt and enrich him, that he ascends up to the summit of it; above him is Jehovah and the great Jehovah alone.

These blessings are said to be God's, because they all come from God and have their origin in him. They are his gifts, and must consequently have been first his possessions.

And they are frequently called "riches" in holy scripture, especially by this apostle. It is a figure under which he seems to delight in describing them. The Lord, he says, is "rich in mercy;" he is "rich unto all that call upon him," He tells us of "the riches of his goodness," "the exceeding riches of his grace," "the unsearchable riches of Christ." The gospel which proclaims his mercy, he calls "a treasure," and says that in it, or rather in that Saviour of whom it testifies, "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

The figure seems to convey to us two ideas—the abundance of these blessings, and their value or excellence.

It intimates their *abundance*. It is not one or two pieces of silver and gold, that constitute a man rich; nor power to relieve one or two beggars, that leads us to call him wealthy. There must be considerable property in his hands, large resources, a power, after supplying his own wants, of supplying the wants of many more. So, when the apostle calls God rich, he must see him to abound in blessings and in those blessings which man needs; to have the command of every thing which man wants, and as much of every thing as man's necessities demand.

And he does so abound, brethren. Where is the want for which his gospel does not offer you a remedy? Where is the blessing he is not able to bestow? He is so rich, that multitudes of sinners may go to him and come away laden with blessings; and yet they who come after them, see in him no diminution. Yea, a whole starving world might go to him for bread and find it, and his abundance be overflowing as ever. Millions on millions could no more exhaust it, than you or I with the hollow of our hand, could exhaust a river or empty a sea. He is able to do, says this apostle, "all that we ask," and "above all that we ask," and "abundantly above all that we ask," and "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask," and

more still—"exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." And again we read, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." The eye of man has seen much, his ear has heard of more than his eye has seen, and his heart has conceived of yet more than his ear has heard of; but neither his eye, ear, nor heart, let them see and hear and conceive as they may, can reach to the extent of Jehovah's riches.

And these blessings are *excellent*. We do not deem worthless things riches, be they as abundant as they may. A mass of sand or a heap of pebbles would never be called a treasure. Riches consist in things that are of high value.

And what so precious as the mercies God has in store for sinners? It is as impossible to estimate their value, as to measure their abundance. We are as unable rightly to appreciate them, as we are to exhaust them. We can no more say of any one of them, "I know the utmost worth of that blessing, or the utmost sweetness of that mercy," than we can say, "I have taken it all; there is none of it left." The least of these mercies is worth more than a world. We may not think so, but every one out of this world thinks so. Our departed friends think so, glorified spirits think so, angels think so, devils think so, God thinks so, and before a hundred years are past, you and I, brethren, shall think so, and in the end every living creature who can think at all in the universe of God.

With these two ideas then in his mind, the Christian may say, "I am poor and needy, but there is wealth in God, abundant and excellent riches, and all suited to my wants. I am guilty, but I see in him a mercy that is boundless; no crimes can surpass it, no provocations can be too great for it. I am naked too, but I see there a robe to cover me; it is so large, that it can conceal all my shame, and so splendid, that it can make even such a soul as mine appear fair and beauteous. I am polluted, but there is a fountain before me, which can cleanse me from every spot and stain. I am comfortless, but there is abounding consolation, there is the fulness of joy for me, in God my Saviour. I am weak, weak beyond my power to tell, flesh and heart fail me beneath my weakness, but with the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. I am starving, but there is food enough and to spare in my Father's house; the

bread of life and the water of life are there, yea, there lies spread out a feast, a large and joyous banquet, for every starving soul."

But why, we may ask, does the apostle call these riches of grace "riches in glory?" Perhaps for several reasons.

Here I must observe that there is a peculiar indistinctness about many of St. Paul's expressions, arising, not from any confusion in his heaven-taught mind, but probably from a crowd of ideas entering his mind together as he writes, and from an effort on his part to give utterance to them all. He adopts a word that expresses no one of them clearly, but glances at all of them. We must not attempt therefore to confine expressions of this kind in his writings to any one particular meaning. We must rather make a hallowed use of their vagueness, and labour to take in all the variety and fulness of meaning they contain.

Thus here—the term "riches in glory" conveys at first no distinct idea to us. It may refer to heaven, the residence of God and the storehouse of spiritual blessings. Or the expression may be equivalent to "glorious riches," and then we may give it a very wide meaning. It may mean that these riches are in themselves glorious, magnificent as well as excellent and abundant; or that they are riches which bring much glory to him that possesses them, riches honourably acquired and honourably spent; or that they are glorious to those that receive them, glorious in their tendency and use. They not only come out of glory, they lead to glory. Earthly riches are generally debasing. To possess them in any abundance, is, in almost every case, to be injured by them. O the minds that riches have blinded! O the hearts that riches have hardened! O the immortal souls that riches have destroyed! But the riches of God's grace never degrade or defile. They purify, and ennoble, and elevate. They assimilate us to themselves, and they go on doing so, till in the end they make us glorious, meet to be the glorious inhabitants of a glorious world.

We have proceeded thus far with the text. We have looked at the view it affords us, first, of our great need, and then of God's great wealth—

III. Let us go on to *the supply which the apostle anticipates for this necessity out of this wealth*; "My God shall supply

all your need according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus." He brings one of these two things, you observe, to bear on the other. He puts them together side by side, and intimates that there is a connection between them, that the one is adapted to, and intended and ready for, the other—God's wealth for man's poverty, God's abundance for our need.

The supply we are to receive, he represents as *certain*. His language expresses a strong conviction of its certainty, for he does not pray that God may give it us, he tells us that he certainly will give it. There is faith in his words, and great faith, as well as gratitude. He seems to feel as sure that his Philipian friends will have their wants supplied, as he is that his own have been supplied. "You have helped me," he says; "so certainly will my God help you. He who has been so mindful of me in my necessity, will never be unmindful of you in yours. He is my God, and because he is mine, blessed be his name! I can trust him. I can trust him for myself, and no less confidently for you. He will supply all your need."

And this supply he describes also as most *abundant*. It is to be a supply for "all" our need, and this, not according to our necessities, but "according to God's riches." And it is to partake too of the character of these riches; for it is to be "according to his riches in glory," a *glorious* supply, putting honour on us as we receive it, and bringing honour to God as he bestows it. It is to be suited to his character, not to ours; commensurate with his magnificence, rather than with our poverty or meanness.

But then we must remember that it is our real need that is to be supplied, not our imaginary need. We are not promised here that which we desire, or that which we suppose we want; but that which God sees we want, and which perhaps we do not at all desire. His supplies are to meet our necessities, not our wishes. Sometimes they may be in direct opposition to our wishes. We may long for rest, and he may give us disquietude. We may say, "Now most surely we need consolation," but he may yet withhold his consolation, or even overspread our souls with a thicker darkness. But still he will supply "all our need;" he will meet every real want and real exigency of the soul, and fully meet it; there shall be no void left. Taking into view their character, their circumstances, and their high destination, the great God will so deal with the people he loves, that

he could not possibly deal with them more bountifully or more munificently. "No good thing will he withhold from them." They shall have every thing which can contribute to their welfare, and have it in the richest measure.

And notice *the channel* through which this abundant provision is to come to us. Our God is to send it us "by Christ Jesus."

In telling us this, the Holy Spirit intimates that the supplies here promised us are not mere things of course; not the gifts of God as the God of nature whose "tender mercies are over all his works," but his gifts as the God of grace. They come to us in a peculiar manner. We receive them, not as the angels are receiving every moment light and joy from God, and as every living thing is receiving from him life and support, but as no other creature receives any blessing—through a Mediator, "by Christ Jesus."

The apostle says that they come through Christ, because, in the first place, Christ purchased them for us. We had forfeited them, but they were all regained for us by Christ's humiliation and blood. "Ye know," he says in another place, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." And they all centre in Christ; are all made over, not in the first instance from God to us, but from God to the Lord Jesus for us, as our representative and head. And then again, they are all communicated to us by Christ. First he purchases them for us, then he receives them for us, and then he bestows them on us. Just as God has caused light to dwell in the sun, and diffuses light over the rejoicing earth by means of that sun, so he has made the blessed Jesus the storehouse of all his abundance, so he has ordained that all the riches of grace and glory that will ever gladden sinful men, shall come out of the fulness he has placed in him. He will supply our need, not as the unseen God, but as the glorified Son of Man.

And it is the connection it has with the Lord Jesus Christ, which makes the supply provided for us so certain, so abundant, and so glorious. It must be certain, for it is the stipulated reward of the Redeemer's sufferings; it must be abundant, for those sufferings were of infinite worth and merited an infinite recompence; it must be glorious, for the bestowing of it is to bring glory to this mighty Saviour, a glory that is to be his

highest and brightest glory, to satisfy his soul, and make him an object of admiration and wonder to assembled worlds.

And now, turning to ourselves, let us ask what are the practical lessons we have to learn.

If we have really taken the Lord for our God, one is *contentment with our present lot*, be that lot what it may. "God," says this text, "shall supply, abundantly supply, all your need." These are indeed the words of a fellow-creature only and addressed by him to others, but they are so spoken, that we may safely regard them as a solemn declaration and promise addressed by the command of Jehovah to ourselves. You see then what must follow, Christian brethren—either that God has forgotten for the first time the declaration of his lips, or that you have no cause whatever to complain of your condition. There may be much to try and grieve you in it, much that you may wish altered, but you must not dare to look upward and say, "Why is this?" Your real need is all supplied. You may read this text, and feel assured that it is. You may not have all you desire, nor all you think really desirable for you; but you have all, and all to the very utmost, that it would be good for you to have. Even in his abundant wealth, the Lord could not give you any thing more without giving you a curse. It would not be a supply of your necessity, it would be a burden which sooner or later would hinder and oppress you. O say no more then, "I am left alone; I am overlooked." Say rather with Paul in this chapter, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." It must be from texts of this kind, that we must learn contentment. Nothing teaches it so persuasively and effectually, as contemplating the abounding greatness of Jehovah, and feeling that this great Jehovah is ours, our own in all his magnificence, to be hoped in and enjoyed.

Another lesson we must learn is *confidence for the future*. As we try to look into it, the future often appears to us perhaps a dreary scene. We can hardly bear to look into it, so crowded does it seem with difficulties, perils, and sorrows. But here comes this text, and without throwing any light on this dark future, without chasing away one of its apprehended evils or promising to do so, tells us that we have nothing to fear in it. "True," it says, "you may find it a desert, a dry and barren

one; true also, you are weak, and helpless, and weary; but go into it. Your God shall supply all your need in it. He will open fountains for you in that wilderness, and streams in that desert. Mercies which you do not anticipate, shall spring up around you as you go along, and in such abundance and often in a manner so glorious, that you shall be half overcome with admiration and thankfulness as you receive them. There is an infinite fulness in God, your Saviour; an inexhaustible store of provisions and blessings; and all is ready for your need. There are riches enough to satisfy millions all waiting to enrich you."

O that you would believe this, and be "quiet from the fear of evil!" O that you more aimed to be quiet! Believe it, brethren, nothing honours God more than a simple belief of his promises and a simple trust in his love. There is nothing he has more laboured in his word to press on you, and encourage and strengthen in you. He tells you of his amazing mercy to give birth in you to this trust in him, and then he lays bare before you his glory and greatness to foster and cherish it. The Lord grant that you may possess and enjoy more of it every day!

SERMON LI.

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

2 CORINTHIANS VIII. 9.—"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."

HERE, brethren, in these few words, is the gospel, its whole sum and substance. If we rightly understand these few words, we understand enough to make us happy for ever; and if we really believe the precious truths they contain, we shall be

happy for ever. There is a power in them, which can save our souls alive.

They offer four points for our consideration.

I. *The original condition of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

"He was rich," says the apostle; and in saying this, he plainly asserts *his pre-existence*, his existence before he came into our world; for where on earth was he rich? Where are the earthly treasures he renounced? Shall we look for them in the stable at Bethlehem, or go in search of them to the cottage of Joseph at Nazareth? We shall go in vain. No; regard him as a mere man, coming into existence for the first time in our world, and the apostle's words have no meaning in them.

But there is more than pre-existence asserted in them. We fall short of their meaning unless we ascribe to the Lord Jesus *much greatness and much glory in the eternity he came from*. He was not only there, he was "rich" there.

Now this term, when applied to a fellow-creature, we understand at once. We call him rich, who, besides having what is necessary for his actual wants, has the means of gratifying many of his desires. Give the word its most enlarged meaning, and then it designates one who possesses more than he can employ for his own use, and who consequently is able to supply the wants and desires of many others. Imagine then a Being inhabiting a world of glory, with all its resources at his command, and all its immense dominions owning him as their Lord. Conceive of him as rich in heaven, and rich there in heavenly things; rich in the estimation of glorious angels, so rich that they go to him for all they need, and depend on him for all they desire, and mean to do so for ever, and know they can do so for ever without exhausting or even diminishing his boundless treasures. And then look at the mighty universe; take a survey of world after world; and whatever you see happy or excellent in any one of them, trace that to this amazing Being. Find it where you will, he created it, it came from him at first, it is still his; so that make it over to him again, lay down at his feet the whole creation, you have not added an atom to his wealth, nor a span to his possessions; you have only given him his own. And then go a step farther. Imagine him as needing nothing of all he possesses; so inconceivably rich in himself, as to be independent of heaven and earth and all they contain; incapable of

having his happiness augmented by the treasures of the universe, and equally incapable of having it impaired by their loss. But it is useless to labour thus. We can form no one adequate conception of the original greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. All we can say is, he was God, the self-existent, boundless Jehovah; no lofty angel, no inferior deity, but "very God of very God," possessing in himself all the fulness of the divine perfections, sharing with his eternal Father in all he was and enjoyed. Nay, he was the eternal Father, one with him in essence as well as in glory; and so entirely one with him, that the moment we attempt to sever him, in his divine character, from his Father, or to conceive of him as thus severed, we are confounded, or worse—we degrade and perhaps "deny the Lord that bought us." There is what we call a distinction of persons in the one glorious Godhead, but it is a distinction which it is dangerous for us even to try to comprehend.

Such was the Lord Jesus Christ, but the text calls on us to view him in a very different condition.

II. It sets before us next *the state to which he humbled himself.*

"He became poor," it tells us; but how? Not as men often become poor, by the loss of their former wealth. Christ as God could lose nothing. He never parted, he never could part for a moment, with his divine fulness or with any portion of it. It is as inseparable from him as his existence. What then are we to understand? Simply this—that the eternal God concealed or veiled his glory; that he assumed and appeared in a new character, and that a character immeasurably below his own. The apostle does not expressly say so, but he evidently speaks of him now as man; still in fact the everlasting Jehovah, still rich as ever in the plenitude of his Godhead, but allying himself to man his creature, taking on him the nature of that creature, and manifesting himself in his form. The same Being who was rich as God, made himself poor by becoming man. The mere circumstance of his assuming our nature was to him an unutterable humiliation. We can understand but little of it. We cannot measure the depth of it, for we cannot measure the height of his original greatness; but let us think for a moment—

Of all God's rational creatures, man is the lowest. We know

not how many orders of beings there are above us, but this we know—there are none below us. Now could it have been conceived that the great Jehovah was about to take on him a creature's form, we could tell at once what form we should have given him. We should have gone to the very summit of the creation, and placed him on a level with the highest archangels there; and then there would have been a depth in this act of condescension, which would have astonished us. But how did God act? "He took not on him the nature of angels." He passed down through one order of beings after another, till he sunk to the very bottom of his rational creation, and took on him the nature of man; and not our nature as he gave it at first to Adam, fair and glorious, but our nature as Adam has injured and blighted it; in one sense, our fallen nature—its weakness, its infirmities, its liability to pain, and misery, and death; save its pollution, every thing connected with it, that can brand it with dishonour. Hence he is said not only to have been "made flesh," but to have come into our world "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He took not on him our sinfulness—God forbid! but he took on him our poverty as sinners, as well as our poverty as men.

And we must go lower yet. View him as a man, he was poor; poor, brethren, even among us, the poor worms of the dust; for he assumed our nature, not in its highest, but in one of its very lowest conditions. No fond expectations which the people who looked for him, had formed concerning him, were realized. No unearthly palace was let down from the skies to be his dwelling place; no monarch was driven from his throne for him to sit on it. A stable was his first habitation, and a manger his first bed; the wife of a carpenter was his parent, fishermen were his companions, and women of the humblest rank his attendants and even his benefactors; they "ministered to him of their substance." Hear his own touching description of his poverty; "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." And observe in what a simple yet striking manner the same fact is intimated by St. John. "Every man," he says at the end of his seventh chapter, "went unto his own house;" but why tell us this, a circumstance so unimportant? Only it would seem to make us notice the next thing he tells us—"Jesus went unto the mount of Olives." Amongst those persecuting Jews, there was not one at the close of the

day, who had not a habitation to go to. Jesus only was obliged to seek a shelter for himself among the rocks of a mountain.

And amidst all this, he was poor in character. "He made himself," we are told, "of no reputation." "He was despised," we are told again, "despised and rejected of men." But a little before, he had been in heaven an object of boundless adoration; the angels adored him as they adored none other; they adored none but him; now miserable men scorned him. Such abject things as you and I, creatures not worthy to breathe his air, hid in loathing and disgust their faces from him. They derided him, they spat on him, they thought his very presence in their world a degradation to it, and wished to sweep him out of it.

And while bearing all this, he was poor in comfort. What matters poverty, brethren, what matters shame or ill treatment, if God is shining into our hearts, and giving us heavenly consolations there? Weak as we are, we can then bear any thing. But there were times when the blessed Jesus was almost a stranger to these consolations. Support indeed he had constantly from his Father, and at times doubtless much solace and peace; but he seems to have received less abiding comfort in his afflictions, less of the outpouring of heavenly joy, than many of his people, and to have suffered much more than any of them from the absence of it. In comparison with what he endured on this account, all his other troubles seem to have been light to him. He felt the treachery of Judas, he was hurt at the cowardice of Peter and the desertion of his other disciples, but galling as these were to his tender soul, they wrung from him no complaint. At length however his Father forsook him, and then indeed he felt poor. He could not bear poverty like this. It forced from him, and not in an hour of bodily ease, observe, but amidst the agony of the cross, in an hour when, we might have said, he can be alive only to the pangs of expiring nature—it forced from him that cry of anguish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

And he sunk lower even than this. "He bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." He died a sinner's death, and laid himself down in a sinner's grave. Here was poverty indeed! I need not say, brethren, that death is humiliating even to degraded and miserable man; no one can look on it without feeling it to be so; but for the Lord of life, the King of glory to come under the power of death, to appear as a mere mass of

clay, a thing bereft of life and consciousness, that which they who love it most, bury out of their sight—who can comprehend such poverty as this? who can fathom such humiliation? Well may we ask, from what motive and for what great object did the Lord submit to it?

His motive, the apostle says, was grace; nothing else but the kindness of his own heart, his own most free, sovereign, boundless mercy. But we must pass this by to notice—

III. *The end he had in view in it*, the object he aimed to accomplish by this unparalleled humiliation. “For your sakes,” says the text, “he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

Observe the picture given us here of our natural condition, the condition in which you and I, brethren, entered the world, and in which many of us still continue. It is a state of poverty, a state of want and destitution. I refer not to the things which concern the body. God may have given us enough of these, and more than enough, for the threescore years and ten during which the body is likely to need them. I refer to the never dying soul, to our situation as rational and immortal creatures, creatures who are going into a state of existence far away from all we now possess, far away from the world and all that it contains. In this light we are poor indeed; so poor, that in all the wide universe, look where we will, there is nothing we can call our own but sin and wretchedness. Poverty is indeed too feeble a word to convey any adequate idea of our forlorn condition. We are not only destitute of all good, but laden with evils. “A man,” it has well been said, “may be poor, and yet owe nothing to any one; but sin is not merely want, it is positive debt. And a man who is both poor and in debt, may be healthy and strong; so that by diligence and hard labour, he may not only procure the necessaries of life, but even be able in time to do justice to his creditors; but sin is disease as well as debt; it is the sickness of the soul, which wastes its strength, and renders it incapable of doing, nay, disinclined to attempt, any thing for the recovery of its health and vigour.” And true it is that sin stupifies us. It renders us insensible to our real situation and circumstances, so that though we talk about our souls and eternity, we naturally care nothing about them, and never act or think with a reference to them. We are in a

dream, and a dream which, if God leaves us alone, nothing but death can break. You remember the Laodicean church. "I am rich," she said, "and increased with goods, and have need of nothing"—it is the language of human nature; it has been the language of every heart that is now beating here; it is in too many instances their language still; but what says God concerning us? "Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Yes, "wretched," even when your hearts are swelling with what you deem happiness, wretched in the song, and the dance, and all the delights that folly and thoughtlessness can give; and "poor," poor amidst your silver and gold, poor in your spacious homes and their costly comforts, poor as you walk over the broad lands you call your own; and "blind," as ignorant naturally of all that is worth knowing, as the brute beasts that perish; and "naked" too, naked as sin can strip you, exposed amidst gospel light and gospel privileges to all the dangers of your lost condition, as much so till you have really put on Christ, as the idolater and heathen.

Now the end of our Lord's interposition on our behalf was to alter our sad condition. It was to make us rich; that is, to put us in possession not merely of all that we need as rational and immortal beings, as creatures of a spiritual nature and an endless existence, but to supply our necessities so abundantly, to heap on us so much more than we need, that no desire in us shall be left ungratified, that even in a heavenly world we shall be accounted rich and actually be so; not paupers, as it were, in God's kingdom and house, but seated on high there among the lofty and great. Observe, the apostle does not say that Christ became poor to save us or redeem us, but to enrich us; in other words, to make us partakers of his own boundless treasures, his own "unsearchable riches" in glory. Look for a moment at the state of the rich man in hell. What has that once proud worldling now, which he can call his own? What is there which he can ever reach and make his own? Not even a drop of water, though he seek for it and struggle for it with his whole soul. Such is a picture of the utter poverty of fallen man. Look now at the beggar Lazarus. He is carried to heaven on the wings of angels; he is in Abraham's bosom, seated on one of the highest seats at the heavenly banquet; he is surrounded with all the glory and blessedness of God. Such is the condition to which Christ became incarnate to raise us.

He visited our world, not merely that he might pluck us as brands from the burning—this was only a preparatory step to the design he had in view; his great object was to make us the children of God and exalt us to everlasting life. Before he became poor, we were debtors who had nothing to pay; and now, if we are his, “all things” are ours; the world is ours, eternity is ours, life and death are ours, things present and things to come; all in earth and heaven is ours, that our desires can grasp or our natures hold.

And notice the close connection which exists between the poverty of Christ and these riches of his people. The one is represented here as flowing from the other. “For our sakes he became poor, that”—what? that he might pass through a state of earthly poverty to a state of authority and power, and exercise this authority and power in ennobling us? We might say this, but the apostle does not say it. He makes no mention of the Redeemer’s lofty exaltation and greatness. He ascribes all we receive from him to his abasement; and in such a way as if he were determined that we should not misunderstand him or overlook his meaning; “He became poor for us, that we through his poverty might be rich.”

How strange this language, and yet how true! To understand it, we must remember that Christ became man, not only for our sakes, but to be our representative. In this character, he fulfilled that law which we had broken, and so magnified it, put so much honour on it, by the awful penalty he paid to it on the cross, that a way is now opened for the safe, and honourable, and most abundant exercise of Jehovah’s mercy towards us. God is pleased to regard his degradation as an atonement or expiation for our sins, and, on our believing on him for salvation, he looks on his obedience or righteousness as though it were ours, imputing it to us, and dealing with us as righteous in consequence of it. And thus the Redeemer’s poverty enriches us. All this was in Paul’s mind when he wrote these words, and it is in his mind still. It is in every man’s mind, who understands rightly the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The whole church below and the triumphant church above, all ascribe the salvation they have found, the riches they enjoy, to the manger and the cross. And why? Because in that manger and cross they see a great propitiation for their great sins. If you cavil at this language, brethren, if your judgment and

feelings revolt at it, be assured that you have yet to learn the first rudiments of Christ's religion. You are in a state of complete darkness as to the real character and design of Christianity. Whoever may know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, you know it not. A crucified Redeemer, a Redeemer crucified, not for our example only, but mainly for our sins, as a sacrifice, an atonement, an expiation—this is the one grand feature, the one grand peculiarity of the gospel, and never will you rejoice in the gospel, never heartily love or prize it, never come under its purifying and cheering influence, never be enriched by it on earth or carried by it to heaven, till you view it in this light; till the poverty of Jesus Christ becomes the foundation of your best hopes; till his cross gets so interwoven with all your views of God and your feelings towards him, becomes so mixed up with every sacred emotion in your souls, that you could sum up all the religion you possess in calling it a glorying in the cross of Jesus Christ, a knowledge of the love displayed in that cross and a heartfelt experience of its power.

And now, in conclusion, let me implore every one of you to ask himself what he knows of the grace he has heard of to-day? The apostle, you observe, speaks of a knowledge of it, and by this he means something more than a knowledge like that we may get of any ordinary fact or science. He has in view such an acquaintance with it, as we often call experimental. It is the result of experience. It is a knowledge of the same kind, as the once diseased man has of the remedy which has saved him, or the once destitute beggar has of the royal gift that has enriched him. Be assured that there is such a knowledge of Christianity as this, and be assured also that it is the only knowledge of it, which is worth possessing.

Ask yourselves then, each one for himself, Do I thus know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? It was once a matter of speculation and enquiry with me; is it now a matter of experience? Do I know it in my heart? Is it affecting my soul, producing in my feelings and affections its natural, legitimate results? What do I think of my own spiritual condition? Am I conscious of that utter poverty in myself, which this text implies? What do I think of the poverty, the humiliation and death, of the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I resting on it to enrich me? Am I building on it all my hopes of salvation and happi-

ness? Is it actually enriching me? Do I feel that it has put me in possession of that which is more valuable to me than all I possess besides? something that I rejoice in more than I rejoice in any thing or every thing else, and could be content with were all else that is dear to me gone? Then bless God, brethren, for his goodness towards you. Love the Lord Jesus Christ, not only for the grace he has displayed in his deep and voluntary poverty, but for the further grace he has manifested in conveying the knowledge of it by his Spirit to your once senseless minds. Strive to become more acquainted with it; to feel, and exemplify, and embody in a holier life, more of its influence. There is no surer test of our having been enriched by Christ, than a desire to be more enriched by him. There is no surer test of knowing him aright, than hungering and thirsting after a closer acquaintance with him.

And let this text stir you up to a right view of your situation as Christians. It is not merely salvation, that Christ has made yours, but wealth, spiritual riches, such things as are deemed valuable in heaven, and even now cause angels and archangels, yea, God himself, to deem you rich on earth, having in hand enough to excite your wonder and thankfulness, and in prospect what the apostle calls "all the fulness of God." O Christian brethren, we seem almost as ignorant now of our privileges in Christ, as we once were of our danger and misery out of him. To look for one day or one hour into our hearts, into their torpor, and death-like coldness, and wretched sinkings, and low, paltry cares—who could believe that you and I are rich in Christ Jesus? The poor sordid miser thinks of his gold when any thing troubles him, and the thought of it comforts him; but where is the comfort we sometimes get amidst worldly losses and bereavements, from the thought of our treasure? O let us try to lift up our minds out of the dust they are cleaving to! This scripture seems to call to us in the words of the prophet, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem. Shake thyself from the dust; arise."

SERMON LII.

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

CHRIST ABLE TO KEEP AND SAVE.

JUDE 24, 25.—“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

How fearless, brethren, is the language of scripture! We ministers often hesitate to say this or that, lest we should be misunderstood. Not so the inspired writers. They wrote for the simple-minded, and they knew, let them say what they would, the simple-minded would not misunderstand them. And if they do sometimes startle us for a moment by any thing they say, we have only to read on, and there generally follows something that clears up their meaning and lays our wonder to rest. Thus, in a preceding verse of this epistle, the apostle calls on his fellow-Christians to do what, we might say, they never can do—they are to “build up themselves on their most holy faith,” they are to “keep themselves in the love of God;” the Holy Spirit’s work seems put on them. But here comes this verse and lets us see that the apostle is as mindful of our weakness, as we are ourselves. He has not been laying God’s work on us. He has only been calling on us to fall in with God’s design concerning us; to seek the strength God is willing to give us, and to trust to him to manifest in us its perfection and greatness. We are to keep ourselves, because God is able to keep us. This is like bidding an infant stand, because its mother is near to hold it up.

I. The first remark we may draw from the text, is this very simple one—*we are in danger of falling*, even those of us who

are really the followers of the Lord Jesus ; for see, in the first verse, to whom the apostle is speaking. It is "to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called."

By "falling" he means sinning. The original word signifies stumbling, and may be applied to any false step we make in our Christian course, whatever its nature or termination.

There is a notion among some persons, that the soul once converted and justified, is secure against all danger, is safe for ever. This is not truth, it is rather a perversion and corruption of the truth. Half of the warnings and promises too addressed to pardoned believers in the scripture, are grounded on the supposition that they are in the utmost danger. And so, brethren, they really are. We are prone of ourselves to fall. What God said of his people of old, "they love to wander," he might say of us. If we have any right knowledge of our own hearts, we shall say it of ourselves. And we are assailed continually from without. There are those around us, who want us to fall. What is Satan doing with us ? What is the world doing with us ? Leading us on to heaven, and holding us up in the way to it ? Alas ! if they would only leave us alone, we would thank them. Satan and the world are doing all they can to throw us down, now laying one snare for our feet and now another. Business, pleasure, society—it is all slippery ground. It is hard work sometimes to move about even for a day without a stumble. David felt this. It was his deep sense of it, which led him to pray, "Hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."

And observe—*all* real Christians are in danger of falling ; not the inexperienced only, but those also who have stood the longest and seem the most established in the faith. Look again at that word "preserved" in the first verse. They, the apostle says here, who have been "preserved in Jesus Christ"—they still need keeping.

And this tells us, brethren, that we must not trust to what we call habits of grace to secure us. We must place no reliance on any long standing in grace. Indeed this long standing is often a snare to us ; it puts us off our guard. We are fearful and cautious when we first enter Christ's ways. We want to know that we are in those ways ; and in order to this, we look well to our goings, we make straight paths for our feet, we look

around us and above us at every step; but when this point seems settled and we begin to feel some confidence in Christ and some assurance of his love, when we can get on cheerfully in his ways, "We shall do now," we say, "the Lord has accepted us;" and away goes our fear, and with it much of our prayer and watchfulness, and then after a little comes a fall. O how common is it in the church of Christ for men to trust in their past steadfastness rather than in God's grace! But there are not fewer pitfalls in the road, because we have been walking a long while in it; and if we say we are become acquainted with its snares, Satan can lay a new snare for us every day. In spite of all our experience, he will be too crafty for us. In every part of the road, there will spring up dangers we know nothing about. Who has not discovered this? Which of us has not often found himself in new circumstances, and beset with new temptations, and walking along what has seemed to him a new road? Besides, an established Christian is a nobler object of attack than a weak one, and when thrown down, affords Satan a higher triumph. His long standing, his distinguished station in the church invite danger. "There," says the enemy to his soldiers, "are the men you must aim at. Leave those young troops alone. They will give way of themselves, or if not, we shall gain little by their defeat, there is but little glory in beating them. But those well trained, veteran troops, those steady, practised warriors—we shall do much if we overthrow *them*." And as though to make his old servants feel their danger, almost all the falls which God tells us of in his word, are those of long tried men. Noah falls after six hundred years' experience. Lot falls when an old man. And David, who passed so safely through the snares of youth, falls in mature age.

II. We come now to a second truth in the text—no matter what our danger is, *the great God our Saviour is able to keep us*.

There is a difference of opinion among divines whether this scripture is to be understood of Christ, or of God the Father. It would be well perhaps if such questions were not raised. We certainly must not understand it of Christ as man, for when on earth, speaking as man, he prays to his Father to keep his disciples, as though none but the Father, the everlasting Jeho-

vah, could keep them. But then, we may say, in his divine nature he is the everlasting Jehovah; and if we apply this scripture to God, we do in fact apply it to him. He is one with God. He is as much our keeper in his divine nature, as he was our sacrifice in his human nature. And so the apostle seems to feel, for though here it is "the only wise God our Saviour" who is to keep us, he says, in the first verse, we are preserved in or by Jesus Christ. This only wise God and this preserving Jesus Christ are in his mind one and the same.

The ability of Christ to keep us is grounded on his power over us, and over those who are the tempters of us. Our danger lies partly in our own hearts. He can master those hearts, and, by the agency of his Holy Spirit, sway and incline them as he pleases. Unruly and tumultuous as their desires seem, they are as much under his control as the waves of the sea, yea, as the stars of heaven, which never deviate from their course. And the same as to the world and Satan: he can overrule their temptations, he can moderate them, and when he pleases, he can put a stop to them. "Be of good cheer," he says to us, "I have overcome the world." "Greater," says St. John, "is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." Hence we read in this epistle, of the Lord "rebuking Satan," beating him back and silencing him. And how all this magnifies the Lord's power!

Conceive of a vessel with its planks loose, its sails rent, and its pilot ignorant and half blind; and then place it among shoals and rocks, with a storm raging—there is a picture of the Christian's condition in the world. That wretched vessel, you would say, is a doomed one; it will inevitably be lost. But suppose you are told that there is an invisible Being watching over it and determined to preserve it; one who can turn it about just as he will, and do what he will with those stormy winds and foaming billows, make those waves roll as he pleases, or, if he pleases, not roll at all—what should you say then? "That vessel is safe." And what would you do? You would delight in looking at it amidst its perils, for you would delight in contemplating the power which is so wonderfully preserving it. So with the believer. "He shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand." God is magnifying his power through that man's weakness, and that man's dangers and temptations. To take him at once to heaven and clothe him at once with a perfectly holy nature, would be nothing to keep-

ing him safe where he is and as he is, with those corruptions within him and those temptations without him.

Again let me say, brethren, we need high thoughts of God; high thoughts of his mercy to lead us at first into his ways—our sinfulness makes that necessary; and then high thoughts of his power to lead us cheerfully on in his ways—our many dangers render this needful. We may say we have no doubt of God's power, but how few of us have any lively conceptions of it! It is like heaven or any thing else which is high and unseen—we may believe in its existence, but it is not often present to our minds, our minds do not realize or grasp it. And this is the reason we are so often told of God's power. It is to bring it before our minds, to make an impression on them by it; to give us such an idea of it, as a man has of some lofty mountain, not when he is thinking of it out of sight of it, but when he sees it lifting itself up before him in the silent sky, or he is climbing its sides. "We are kept by the power of God unto salvation"—our aim should be to get a lively faith in the power that is keeping us; to look on God as bearing down all opposition in the way of our salvation, as having ready for our help the omnipotence which brought the universe into existence, and could in a moment put it out of existence again.

III. We learn further from the text, that *the Lord Jesus has high designs concerning us, which he is able to accomplish.*

We think chiefly of being kept in his ways. We are like travellers whose thoughts are almost all taken up with the road along which they are journeying. But the Holy Spirit is ever pointing us in scripture to the end of our journey; he is continually placing before us the glory for which we are destined. He tells us here that Christ is able to lead us on, as well as uphold us; and that he has this ultimate design in view in upholding us and leading us on—"to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

How much, brethren, do these few words contain! Every one of them seems to speak. "To present us"—to present us "faultless"—to present us "faultless before the presence of his glory"—and to do this "with exceeding joy."

"To present us." If we are really his people, we have presented ourselves to Christ, yielded ourselves to him. His ministers perhaps will present us to him when he comes, as the

fruits of their labours. But this will not satisfy him. He so loves us, that he says he must put more honour on us—he will present us to himself. He will let us see that his church is not only his bride, but a bride he has chosen and delights in accepting. Other brides are led to the bridegroom by their friends; he will go for his and lead her himself.

And to present us “faultless.” O how that word comforts the Christian’s heart! It is the very word he would have put into this text, had the Holy Spirit left a blank and told him to fill it up. Other men would have said “happy;” but he says, “No; faultless, holy. I shall be supremely happy then.”

And this idea in this connection is of frequent occurrence in scripture, especially in St. Paul’s writings. The church is to be presented to Christ, he says, “as a chaste virgin.” He will “present it to himself,” he says again, “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” As we have read to-day, we are to be “blameless” before him at his coming. And when we are in heaven, we are to be there, St. John tells us, “without fault before the throne.”

But again—we are to be presented “before the presence of his glory,” and to be “faultless before the presence of his glory.”

We should have thought it a great thing to have been presented to Christ in the day of his humiliation; to have sat by his side with John, or at his feet with Mary; but he says here, “I will present you to myself in the day of my glory. I will own you as mine in the day of my greatness. Now, when you come to me, I am on a throne of grace, but I will seat myself then on a throne of glory. I will put on my royal apparel, and so I will receive you. To do you honour, I will welcome you in all my splendour.”

And we are to be faultless before his glorious presence. A thing sometimes appears pure and white, but bring it into the daylight or put it down on the new-fallen snow, it appears so no longer. Not so here. We shall bear the daylight; our whiteness shall bear the snow. Our purity will be such, that close before the holy Saviour, in the immediate presence of him who is purity itself, we shall be faultless and appear so. His heavens are not clean in his sight, but we shall be clean in his sight. His perfect image will be on us; his own pure eyes will see in us no spot or stain. Faultless before the throne—think of that,

brethren, when sin is tormenting you. How complete in the end will be your deliverance from it! Every fragment and trace of it will be gone.

And yet further—Christ will do this “with exceeding joy.” “He will give us joy,” you will say, “as he does it. We shall shout for joy as he calls us to himself.” But this, I conceive, is not the apostle’s meaning. He is not thinking of our joy, but of Christ’s. Ours will be nothing to his. Expanded as our natures will be and full our hearts, they will still be contracted natures, our hearts will still hold nothing in comparison with the Lord’s. They will be as cisterns to the ocean. Full and running over they may be, but that wide ocean also is full and running over, and who can measure its breadth or depth? St. Paul took delight in those whom he had brought to God. He calls his Thessalonian converts “his glory and joy, his crown of rejoicing,” and every faithful minister of the gospel shares his feelings; but what were these Thessalonians to Paul? what are any of you to us? Not so much as a hair of your head is to Christ. He has an interest in you, which no other can have; he loves you so as none other can love; and he will rejoice in your salvation as none but he can rejoice. “He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied,” says the prophet; we shall understand his words better one day than we understand them now, but we shall never know much of their meaning. The satisfaction of an infinite mind; the completion, the perfection of his happiness, who is God as well as man—we shall never be able to fathom that. We can feel now that it will be exceeding joy; we shall see as we witness it, that it is exceeding joy; as we grow happier and happier, we shall comprehend more and more of it, but it will be exceeding joy still, a joy rising above all our knowledge and thoughts.

Turn again to the text. It suggests to us one remark more.

IV. In keeping his people and accomplishing his glorious designs concerning them, *God manifests his wisdom.*

“To the only wise God our Saviour,” says the apostle, “be glory.” He passes, you observe, abruptly from our stability in God’s ways and our final salvation, to God’s wisdom, letting us see that he discovered wisdom and great wisdom in God’s method of keeping and saving us. He gives to his wisdom the glory of our salvation. He is the only wise God; therefore,

he seems to say, he is able to keep us from falling and to save us.

And observe the deep impression he has on his mind of the greatness of God's wisdom. He does not call him the wise, but "the only wise God," as though there were none wise but he; as though there were such a perfection of wisdom in him, that all other wisdom is folly in comparison with it. "There is none good but God," said Christ; the purest creature that breathes, is unclean in comparison with him. So, says this apostle, there is none wise but God; no creature can lay claim to wisdom by his side.

And it is by taking notice of such casual expressions as these, that we often get our ideas of the divine character enlarged, and our own hopes enlarged with them. Some of us rarely think of God's wisdom as doing any thing now to keep or save us. It planned the glorious scheme of our salvation, we think, and then retired, leaving mercy and grace to execute it. Or if we do carry our thoughts farther than God's mercy and grace, we take in perhaps only his faithfulness. But all the perfections of Jehovah are at work for us. Not one of them does he suffer to be unemployed. When his people are to be saved, he calls all the energies of his glorious nature into exercise, and keeps them in exercise till their deliverance is accomplished. He saves them with his whole heart and his whole soul. Our hope therefore ought to rest on all his attributes. It would be a stronger hope if it did so. Mercy must ever be its main stay, but here are two supports placed under it quite unconnected with mercy—power and wisdom. And observe how beautifully they are coupled together. Power to keep us would be nothing without wisdom to direct it—it would not know how to help us; and wisdom would be nothing without power—it might see what was needed for us, but there it must stop, it could not accomplish it. But combine power and wisdom, infinite power and wisdom, and let them be under the never failing impulse of infinite love, and what will be the result? It will be exactly that which this text foretels—a glorious salvation for us and exceeding joy for our Lord; a salvation for us, which will have, as it were, the stamp of all God's perfections on it, reflect all his glory, and a joy for our Lord to which all those perfections have contributed, a joy which is the workmanship of all, and in which they will find for themselves for ever unutterable delight.

There are two lessons which some of us may learn anew to-day. The first is *a lesson of praise*.

Hitherto, Christian brethren, you have been kept, some of you wonderfully kept. As you look back on the dangers through which you have been carried, you can hardly believe it true that you have escaped them. You are like men who have passed through fire and it has not burnt them. You have had proofs in your own case of God's power to keep and God's wisdom in keeping. How often have you said with David, "My foot slip-peth;" and yet a little after have been forced to say, "Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up!" And what is to be the result of all this? Praise to the God who has kept you, and praise from you.

Think again of some storm-driven vessel. Is the wonderful preservation afforded it, to excite the admiration of those only who are gazing on it from the heights above? Is the shout of gladness to come from no lips but theirs, as it clears rock after rock against which it had well nigh dashed, and rises up from the billow which staggered and seemed to have buried it? O no! There must be thankfulness within that vessel itself. Those rescued voyagers must surely adore and praise. Look at this apostle. He gets a sight of God's power and wisdom shining forth in the preservation of his church, and he breaks forth in his praise as though he could not be silent, as though he longed for him to be every where praised and glorified. "To the only wise God our Saviour," he says, "be glory, glory and majesty, dominion and power. It is he who upholds us. I see in your safety and mine more than his power, I see the glory of his power; I see his sovereignty and I see his magnificence. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. O that all his church would adore and praise him! And when shall our praise begin? When these storms are over and our deliverance is complete? Let it rather begin now. Let us praise him while the tempest rages, praise him amid our dangers. Angels on high are praising him as they see him keep us, and we will praise him with them while we are kept. And we will not stop there—we will praise him when all our danger is past. To him be glory, glory now and glory for ever." There is feeling, you observe, brethren, in this language of the apostle. Let there be feeling, adoring and grateful feeling, in your hearts.

A lesson of trust and confidence is another we are to learn to-day.

Is Christ able to keep us and able to sanctify us? Is he all-wise to see our dangers, and all-powerful to carry us through them? Then let us quietly commit ourselves to his keeping. You are afraid of falling. I do not say, cease to fear it. Would that some of you feared it more! "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." But while you fear, trust. This is the perfection of Christian wisdom—to see, on the one hand, the greatness of our perils, and, on the other, the greatness of the help prepared for us; to be afraid to take one step in our journey without looking about us, and so to lean every step on the arm which supports us, as though we felt sure it would uphold us.

And, brethren, be willing for God to employ what means he pleases for your preservation. Remember he is "the only wise God, your Saviour." If your heart is like one heart I could tell you of, you are often wishing to prescribe to God. You want to be kept in this manner and that, and to be led on to heaven in this way and the other; but this will not do. We must cease from this. You and I must leave all to God. It is not likely that he in his great wisdom, and we in our great folly, will always judge alike. He will often hold us up by means which will seem to us as though they must cast us down. He will perfect his work concerning us, but it will be in a way we shall seldom understand. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart," this scripture says, "and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

And let not the careless part of us think they have nothing to do with this text. Brethren, if it requires the power of God and the wisdom of God to "uphold the feet of his saints," to keep the holiest man living from falling, what is your condition, you who never seek for any wisdom or power greater than your own to keep you? One thing is clear—it is a condition very unlike that of God's saints. Indeed it is. You want no one to hold you up, for you are not trying to stand; you have never entered God's ways, but are walking on still in your own. And where will your own ways lead you? Where have they led you? To happiness? No. To holiness? Shall you stand faultless before Christ, when you see him on his throne? Alas! there will be the guilt of ten thousand times ten thousand sins on your heads, and in your hearts corruptions that will rage there for ever.

“Turn ye,” says this text to you, “turn ye from your evil ways. Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”

SERMON LIII.

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

JESUS SUFFERING WITHOUT THE GATE.

HEBREWS XIII. 11, 12, 13.—“The bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”

AN intelligent Jew in St. Paul’s days would readily understand this language. It would carry his thoughts back to the camp of his fathers in the wilderness, and its meaning would become immediately obvious and clear. We too have only to place the same scene before us, and we shall understand it.

I. It speaks of *a custom that prevailed among the Israelites in the wilderness*; “The bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.”

The apostle writes as though the camp and this custom still existed. The camp however was gone, but the custom remained with this difference only, that the temple was now substituted for the tabernacle and the city for the camp. It was a custom of divine appointment. The Lord, in framing a law for the Jews, regarded the whole nation as sinners. Besides therefore the offerings to be made by individuals for their own sins, various sacrifices were ordained for the sins of the nation, and among these, one of unusual solemnity. It was to be offered once in every year, and on a certain day of the year, called from this

circumstance the day of atonement. There were two peculiarities connected with it. On ordinary occasions, the blood of the animals slain was either thrown on the altar or poured out by the side of it; but on this occasion it was to be taken by the high priest into the holy of holies, and sprinkled there on the mercy-seat. At other times too, the victims offered were either burnt on the altar or left to be eaten by the attendant priests and those who brought them; on this solemn day, they were to be carried outside the camp and there burnt.

It is easy to see that both these peculiarities must have been to a Jew of a reflecting mind highly significant and impressive. Did he behold the high priest taking up the blood of the victims, and going alone with it into the innermost sanctuary, the immediate presence of Jehovah in his tabernacle? "We have to seek to-day," he would say, "a nation's pardon, the pardon of all the sins of all the people; we must seek it therefore with the greatest possible solemnity and with unusual earnestness, not at a distance from our offended God in these outer courts of his house, but, through our appointed intercessor, at his feet; presenting before his very face the blood we have shed at his command as an expiation for our sins, and pleading there for mercy and forgiveness." And did he then turn round and see the animals themselves carried away from the tabernacle to be cast out and burnt? "Even so," he would say again, "do all we deserve to be cast out, to be driven away in our wickedness as accursed things and utterly consumed." He would see in the slain goat and the slain bullock going forth to the flames, what a hateful thing sin is to God, even when he pardons it; and that he will not pardon it, without giving us at the same time some plain indication of his holy displeasure against it.

But why does the apostle refer to this custom? It is that he may throw light on

II. *An event which took place at Jerusalem, closely resembling it;* "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."

We may notice here three points of resemblance between our Lord and the animals burnt on the day of atonement.

1. *They did not die a natural death;* their blood was shed before they were carried forth. And our Lord also "suffered;" his precious blood too was poured forth.

2. And *he suffered in the same place in which these animals were destroyed*. They were slain indeed in the camp, but they were burned outside of it. So our Lord "suffered without the gate." "They led him out to crucify him," we are told, out of their city, to the very spot probably where after the people were settled in Jerusalem, the bodies of those beasts which had so long prefigured him, were consumed.

3. And *he suffered too for the same end*. The blood of these animals was shed, that it might be taken "into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin," as a propitiation for sin; their bodies were burned as a testimony of the divine indignation against sin. When these two ceremonies had been gone through, God is said to have been reconciled to his people, the whole camp was considered as purged from its transgressions. And what was the end for which our Lord suffered? It was that his people, his spiritual Israel, might have sin removed from them; "Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."

The word "sanctify" must not be taken here in its ordinary sense, as signifying to make spiritually holy. The people of Christ are indeed made spiritually holy by him, and it was one end of his suffering to make them so, but it was not the immediate end, nor that which is now in the apostle's mind. He means here by the word, to consecrate or set apart for God, to appropriate or devote to God, to make his. So we are said to sanctify the sabbath unto him, and so our Lord is said to have sanctified himself, when he said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God;" when he gave himself up to do and suffer his will on the earth and become our Saviour.

Now we, brethren, like these Israelites, were a guilty people, and, as such, in the sense of this text, an unsanctified people. We were not the Lord's; we were cut off from him, lost to him, with the curse of his broken law upon us and everlasting banishment from his presence before us—a miserable condition for creatures to be in, whose only real happiness lies in his favour and presence. The Lord Jesus beheld us in this condition. He comes forth and says, "This shall not last. My love and pity cannot suffer it to last. See you those victims bleeding there for that guilty camp? I myself will become a bleeding victim. I will take all the sins of all my guilty people on myself. In my own body I will bear them, and with my own

blood I will expiate them." He shed his blood, shed it openly amid disgrace and shame at the city's gate; and then he took it up himself into his Father's presence, went with it into the holiest of all holy places, the heavenly sanctuary, and there he presents it and pleads it before his Father for his people's pardon. And pardoned they are. The Father accepts the offering he has made for them. No sooner do they really trust in it for remission, than their guilt is cancelled, the curse falls off them, the sentence gone forth against them is reversed; no longer far off from God, they are again brought nigh to him; restored to his favour; loved and delighted in as his own; taken possession of and dwelt in, renewed, purified, and adorned, by his Spirit; set apart for his glory and service; and destined to share for ever his unbounded happiness. They are now a sanctified people, sanctified unto God, a people made his own, a peculiar people unto him, a holy nation; and this because the Lord Jesus, that he might thus sanctify them, suffered without the gate. This was the end of his suffering, the object it was intended to accomplish by his Father who sent him, and the great object he himself kept ever in view while enduring his sufferings. How strange, brethren, that we sinners should ever lose sight of this! that we should ever think of his sufferings without thinking of this! And what can they know of Christianity—I will not say of its glory, but of its nature and purpose—who profess to believe in a dying Saviour, and yet never see in him a propitiation for their sins, never regard him as the great Reconciler, the restorer of peace, communion, and friendship, between them and their God?

Another part of the text now claims our attention. It contains

III. *An exhortation grounded on the event the apostle mentions*; "Jesus, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."

We must again imagine ourselves in the desert. Around us are spread the tents of Israel. The men dwelling in them are all worshipping the Lord in one way—as their fathers worshipped him, looking for his mercy through rites and ceremonies and bleeding victims. The Lord Jesus appears amongst them; tells them he is sent of God to abolish these rites and ceremo-

nies, to become himself once for all a victim for them, and calls upon them in consequence to turn from their shadowy rites and long accustomed sacrifices to him. Instead of this, they cast him forth out of their camp and crucify him. We are to conceive of him therefore as even now hanging in shame and suffering on a cross beyond the gate, and then comes this apostle saying to us among our tents, "Let us not linger here. Let us go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."

It is clear then that he calls on us, first, *to forsake the religion of our fellow-men*, a religion, it may be, that either is or once was our own.

The Jew in the desert could not go forth to a bleeding Jesus without turning his back on the Jewish worship, and giving up all his long cherished Jewish hopes. He must abandon the sanctuary and ordinances with which all his religious feelings have been long associated, and around which he beholds his countrymen still gathering. A painful sacrifice. The Jews to whom this epistle was addressed, scarcely knew how to make it. Even those who really embraced the gospel, looked back and lingered as they made it. They wanted, if possible, to be in their beloved temple and at the cross at the same time.

And it is the same now, brethren. Many of us have a religion that the gospel calls on us to renounce. It is made up of opinions, and feelings, and hopes, which are as much opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as the religion of any Jew ever was. We may have cherished it long, even from our childhood. The world around us may respect and commend it; it is natural it should do so—it is the world's own religion; the world taught it us. But no matter who commends it or how highly we may have valued it, we must let it go; or rather we must turn our backs on it, we must cast it away, before we and the cross of Christ can ever meet. The religion I am speaking of, is one that makes much of ourselves and very little of the Lord our Saviour; that puts our merit and righteousness where he tells us to put his. Like the religion of most of the Jews, it deems shadows substance and leans upon them as though they were substance, making forms and ceremonies, sacraments and ordinances, the ground we build our hopes on, rather than that glorious foundation God himself has given us to build our hopes on, even Jesus Christ. It matters not what name this religion bears, it is under every name and in every age and place essen-

tially the same. Whether in a Pagan, Jewish, or Christian dress, the world's religion is ever the same thing, a substituting of man for God, of pretence for reality, of form for substance, of bodily observance for spiritual obedience, for the subjugation of the soul to the law and will of God. Such a religion must go and go entirely, if we would become the real disciples of Jesus Christ. It will not blend with the gospel, and we must not attempt to make it blend with it. "We have an altar," says the apostle in the preceding verse, "whereof they have no right to eat, which serve the tabernacle;" they will not eat of it, and if they would, they are prohibited; they cannot.

And with the religion of the world, *we must forsake also to a considerable extent the men of the world.*

It was not the tabernacle only and its services, which the Jew had to leave. With Christ at the gate, he could not go forth to him from the camp without leaving his countrymen also. His friends and companions, his brethren, all must be abandoned. He must move along a solitary being or nearly so, to the camp gate, and there, it may be, a solitary being or nearly so, must he remain. And come out from the world, dear brethren, must we, if we would really be found at the feet of Jesus Christ. He is still without the gate, beyond the boundary of the world's tents, and we must be content to leave the world behind us, or never go to him. His own language on this point is some of the plainest and strongest that ever fell from his lips. He calls upon us to forsake all we have for him, and tells us that if we do not forsake it, we cannot be his disciples. Father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, all, he says, if they interfere with our adherence to him, are to be—what? left? No, "hated;" left as we would leave a thing which is become distasteful to us; left willingly, cheerfully, so that we shall seem to hate them as we leave them; and again he tells us that unless we do this, or are ready to do it, we are not and cannot be his disciples. Such language often startles the young Christian. The reason is, he does not half know as yet what the world is, nor what his holy Saviour is. He sees little as yet of the contrariety and opposition between the two. But the experienced Christian is not startled. He has seen and felt this contrariety; he has had evidences enough of this opposition; his own experience has lodged deeply in his mind a conviction of the world's inveterate, though perhaps denied and

cloked hostility to his blessed Lord; and while he still pities and, in one sense, still loves the world, will deny himself, spend and be spent, labour to the very utmost, for the world's good, he wonders not when he hears his Master command him to give it up, and to give it up as one who hates it; he wonders not when an inspired apostle tells him, "Whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." It is his heart's desire and prayer to detach himself from it. "Lord," he says, "draw me out of it; let me have less and less to do with it. Let me get farther from the world, that I may be nearer thee; let me live higher above it, that I may live closer to thee."

But again—connected with this forsaking of the world, there must be *an actual coming*, the apostle says, *to Christ our Lord*. Observe, he does not simply bid the Israelites leave the camp, as though his only object was to get them away from their old religion and companions, he directs them all to one spot; he bids them leave the camp for one purpose, that they may go to him who is suffering for them without the gate. So we are not to go forth only, we are to go forth unto Christ. It will profit us nothing to give up the empty religion of the world, if when we let that go, we get no other. Superstition for scepticism is a poor exchange. And it will profit us as little to forsake the world, if we stand still when we have forsaken it. The going forth the apostle enjoins, is not going into cells and hermitages, it is not shutting ourselves up in silent cloisters, nor is it roaming this desert world in a proud, dreary solitariness. It is a going forth unto Jesus. It is exchanging the religion of the world for the religion of his cross; it is giving up that which cannot elevate, comfort, or save us, for that which can. And then it is leaving the world for the world's Master; it is suffering the loss of all things that we may win Christ; it is the forsaking of a world which is not worthy even of us, that we may be—what? outcasts? No; but "fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God;" sharers now of higher riches and pleasures than the earth can give, and heirs of a world that is worthy, if any world can be, of the God who made it. The religion of Jesus Christ is not a religion of renunciation only, it is a religion of acquirement and possession. It throws away that which is evil and worthless, that it may lay hold of that which is excellent and precious. Never regard it, brethren, as intended to rob you, it is intended to enrich you. It calls you

off from shadows, that you may "inherit substance." It says, "Give up illusions, that you may grasp realities."

And one thing more—we are to bear the reproach of Christ as we go forth to him. The apostle however does not exactly call upon us to do this; he intimates rather that we cannot go forth to him without doing it, that there is no leaving the camp and joining him, without taking his reproach on us. Nor is there. Think yet once again of an Israelite coming out of his tent to go to him. He is leaving his countrymen for one whom they have thrust out and slain. He is giving up the society, comforts, and religion, of their camp, for a malefactor and his cross in the wilderness. And will they let him alone as they see him doing this? No. Pity for him, they say, will not allow them to do so; and if pity would, pride will not. Every step the man takes is a censure on them, their religion and ways. Such a man indeed will never dream of being let alone. "No," he will say, "I must make my way to him I am going to, through scorn, reproach, and, it may be, suffering. I will endeavour to provoke no one as I go along, but I know well enough that there will be many ready to provoke me. Were I meek and lowly as my suffering Lord himself, I could not move through such a camp as this without ill usage. The reproach of them that have reproached him, will fall on me. But what of this? I have counted the cost and I will go on. I will go a despised sinner to a despised Saviour. Like that Saviour himself, I will endure the cross and despise the shame. I feel that in his strength I can do this; nay, I feel that I can do more than this. Painful as is at times the reproach that is cast on me, I would not part with it. It is the reproach of Christ, and because it is his, it is dear and precious to me. It is my secret joy and glory. With his servant of old, I can esteem it riches, and greater riches than all the treasures of the world."

Shall I say to you, brethren, learn this lesson? It is not so difficult a lesson as it at first appears. Were there nothing more difficult between us and heaven, I could almost say, how easy would our path to heaven be! But are we in the path there? That is the great question. Are we really going forth to him who suffered for us? Is he in our eye and in our heart? Are we going on prepared to give up every thing that we may find him and be with him? This point once settled, we may be well content to let the world treat us as it will. A man flying from

everlasting destruction will not much heed what is thought of him, or said of him, as he moves along. A man beloved of God will not miss much the favour and love of his fellow-men. A man with his heart with Christ in heaven will soon learn to make light of all earthly ills.

SERMON LIV.

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE CHURCH THE HOUSE OF GOD.

1 TIMOTHY III. 15.—“The house of God, which is the church of the living God.”

WE all know that affection, when it is strong, leads us to apply names to those we love expressive of our attachment to them; and if our affection for them is very strong, we apply to them many of these names. And thus our own gracious God discovers to us his love for his church. He gives it in his holy word a great variety of names. Except the Lord Jesus Christ, no one person or thing is called there by so many. He seems to have feelings towards it, which impel him to add title to title in order to give utterance to them. It is his vineyard, his garden, his flock, his portion, his inheritance, his family. Here in the text it is his house.

The apostle's words present to us three ideas—the church of God, that church a house, and that house the house of God.

I. Here is *the church of God*.

You will perceive at once why I begin with this. All you are about to hear, is concerning the church. It is necessary therefore that we should distinctly understand at the outset what the church is.

In common discourse, we generally mean by this word a building set apart by Christian people for public worship; but it is doubtful whether the Greek term which we translate "church," is ever used in scripture in this sense. Nor is this strange. The early Christians had no such buildings or very few of them. They met to worship their divine Master in their own houses, in dens and caves of the earth, or wherever violence and persecution would allow them.

The original word signifies an assembly, an assembly of any kind; and it is frequently so translated in our English testament. Now the apostles did not aim at novelty. They had indeed new truths to declare, but they did not create new words in order to declare them. They took those which they found in common use among the people, and applied them to sacred purposes. Accordingly when any number of Christians met together and formed a congregation, they called it an assembly or church. And with this application of the word, they appear to have set out. They meant nothing more by it at first than a particular or single congregation. Thus we read of the church in this place and that place, and several times over of a church in a house. After a little however the word began to be applied to a number of congregations united together, as the church of Jerusalem and the church of Corinth, each of which, from the multitude of converts in them, must necessarily have contained several congregations. Thus also we often say the church of England.

But we must follow the word yet farther. It is often used to signify all the churches that are in existence at the same time on the earth; all baptized persons; the whole body of professing Christians wherever dispersed or however distinguished; what our creed means by the catholic or universal church, and what we generally mean when we say the visible church of Christ.

And even yet we have not done. There is one meaning more which the expression bears, and the highest of all. It has nothing to do now however with the merely nominal Christian; it takes now a purely spiritual though a wide sense. It includes all the people of God, not of all nations only but of all ages; all real believers in the Lord Jesus that have been, or are, or shall hereafter be; the whole number of the redeemed from among men whether on earth or in heaven. It comprehends our pious fathers, and it takes in us if we are like them:

God grant that it may take in our children also ! It goes back to the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles ; and it goes forward to the very last of the sons of men, who shall fly to the great Saviour and find mercy. This indeed is eminently "the church of the living God." This is what God generally means when he speaks in the scripture of his church. It is this which he is said to have loved and to have given himself for. It is this that he styles his "glorious church;" that he calls by so many names and loves to view in so many characters; that he speaks of as his bride, his body, his fulness, in fact, under almost every figure which can express connection and delight. To say that the apostle calls this only "the house of God," would be perhaps going too far, but he certainly has this chiefly in his mind in this passage. Every church, yea, every single believer, is in an inferior sense a house of God, but would we look at his one great, his highest, noblest house, we must carry our minds forward to "the general assembly and church of his first-born;" to that final meeting together of his saints, which makes the heart burn as it thinks of it; to that bringing together in heaven of all that he has ever snatched from the pollution of earth, and the forming of all into one glorious body under one glorious Head, "the Shepherd and Bishop of souls."

By the church then, as we are using the word to-day, we mean all the people of God of every age and nation viewed as one assembly. This we are now to look on in a particular light.

II. It is *a house*.

Three things are required to constitute a house—a foundation, materials for the superstructure, and a putting of these materials together into order and form. All these we shall find in the church.

1. It has *a foundation*. The Lord himself points it out to us; "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." And St. Peter, in quoting these words, explains them. He says that God refers in them to his spiritual house, his church, and that he means by this stone and this foundation his incarnate Son. St. Paul too speaks to the same effect. "Ye are God's building," he tells his Corinthian converts, and then he immediately alludes to Christ as the foundation of this building, and the only one.

"Other foundation," he says, "can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Now if we divest this language of metaphor, its meaning is, that the Lord Jesus stands in a relation to his church similar to that which a foundation bears to a building. His church rests on him. He bears it up. Its pardon, its holiness, its hope, its blessedness, its safety, its very existence, all depend on him. Without Christ there could have been no church at first; take him away, there would be none now; there would not be a pardoned sinner on the earth, nor a redeemed sinner in heaven. All that infinite mercy has done, would be undone. The foundation would be gone; not only therefore must the rising building be stopped, that part of it which has been already raised, must fall. Hence it is said that by him "all things" hang together or "consist."

And it is one part of vital godliness and the main part, to understand this. It is not self-evident. Men do not see the foundation of a building. The child that comes into this house of prayer, never thinks of the buried work which bears up its walls. Set him to build a mimic church in imitation of it, he lays no foundation whatever. But the architect, the practical workman, begins with the foundation. He cannot overlook it, for he understands its importance. So the mere pretender to godliness thinks that the church has little to do with the Lord Jesus, but to bear his name. He imagines that he himself can do without him. He can form hopes and expectations, and rest them any where. The truth is, he is playing with the whole matter; he is trifling with his immortal soul. But look at the man who is in earnest—he makes Christ his all. He lays the whole weight of himself and his hopes on him. Ask him why he does so, "I have found out," he says, "that I must do so. I have seen and I have felt that every hope which is laid elsewhere, sinks into the mire and perishes."

And the most experienced Christian understands this the best. If any of you, brethren, do not understand it, be assured that you have yet learned nothing which is worth knowing. You may belong to the church of England, or, as you conceive, to some purer and more spiritual church, but you belong not to the church of Christ. You are not on the foundation, and this one thing mars all. Take a stone, hew it, polish and adorn it, make it in appearance every thing the builder wants for his fabric; yet if it does not rest in some way on the hidden foun-

dation, it can form no part of the house, it will be an incubance. So with you—you may be brought into an outward conformity by education, by rites and ordinances, with the people of God, you may be like them and seem to be one of the goodliest of them all, but if the Lord Jesus Christ does not bear you up, if you are not laid on him and resting on him, when the scaffold is removed, you will go down; when the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised, you will have no name or place in his heavenly house. “Behold,” says God, “I lay in Zion a foundation;” get on it, and the wreck of a world cannot shake you. Stand any where off it, that wreck shall sweep you away with it and overwhelm you in its ruin.

2. The *materials* too of this house are found mentioned in scripture. They are however *the very last we should have thought likely to build it*. Here is a glorious foundation laid, a heavenly and divine one, and what is God bringing together to put on it? Not all the collected glory and excellency of his wide universe, the riches of the sun and the stars, but the rubbish of our miserable earth. He chooses men for his purpose; men when he might have taken angels; fallen, sinful men; men no better than their fellow-men, nay, in some instances worse; men esteemed vile in their own vile world, the refuse of the bad, the dross of the dross. “Ye are God’s building,” said Paul to the Corinthians, and what were these Corinthians? He gives them a catalogue of the basest sinners that their profligate city or the whole earth could furnish, and then he says to these very men, these men destined for the walls of God’s glorious house, “Such were some of you.”

We come then to this conclusion—no meanness, no guilt, will cause God to reject any one of us. An earthly builder is obliged to cast away bad materials, for he cannot alter them. God has promised to cast away none that come to him, for he can alter them. He is willing to take the worst, for he is able to transform them and make them the very best.

But though all alike earthly and all vile, *yet these materials, in some points, differ very much from each other*. We see among them men of all countries, all classes, all characters, all ages; here a poor man, there a rich and noble one; here a man of the loftiest intellect, one whose soaring mind appears ready to scale the heavens before it gets to them, there another who knows little more than this, that he has a guilty soul which has

found in Christ a Saviour. Now a mere babe that has hardly seen the light, is taken to this building, and now an old man, just as he is falling into the grave, is set apart for it. Look at the materials brought together to raise a splendid earthly structure—there cannot be a greater difference among them, than among the materials of this heaven-built house. And this difference will probably in some measure always continue. Grace, we see, does not wholly remove it, nor perhaps will glory wholly conceal it. The infant of earth may be recognised in the kingdom of heaven, and there the lofty intellect may be lofty still, thirsting more than others for the discovery of God's glory, and delighting more than others in the vision and contemplation of it.

One thing more however must be said of these materials—in all this diversified mass, *there is nothing to be found, which is not prepared for the heavenly building before it goes to it.* True, God does choose in his wonderful mercy earthly and base materials wherewith to build his house; there could not be baser; but he does not leave them base, no, nor yet earthly. He works on them. Though he does not find them fit for heaven, he makes them so. He changes them within and without; not their form only, but their very nature; so that when they are removed to heaven, they are heavenly; as well fitted for that holy world, as they once were for this polluted one. Hence St. Paul says to those very Corinthians whom he had just described as once so abominable, and says it immediately after he had told them what they once were, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified. A change has passed on you, and an entire and great one." And you remember, brethren, how it was with the first temple at Jerusalem, a type of God's house in heaven; "There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in that house while it was in building;" it rose up in a solemn silence. And how was this? "The house when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither." It is idle for a man to think of heaven with an unchanged and unholy heart. We are brought into God's church below rude and unformed, like stones just brought from the quarry; some of us too very polluted. Any one in any state may enter in. But no sooner is any one really in, than there is the hammer at work, and the axe, and the tool of iron. They are heard by the man and they are felt

by the man, and felt deeply and long. He as certainly becomes an altered man, as he becomes a pardoned one. He gradually goes through a spiritual process which fits him for heaven. "This is the law of the house," says the prophet, "Upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house."

3. But materials, however selected and prepared, will not of themselves form a building, no, not even if cast on a good foundation. There must be further *a putting of them together*. They must be sorted, and arranged, and united; each one must go into its proper place; otherwise they will be a confused heap, not a house.

Now there is a great overlooking of this fact amongst us, as applied to the church. We almost forget that God has a church. We feel as though we stood alone before him, and were to be saved alone. As for our fellow-Christians, we know indeed that they are our fellow-Christians, going along the same road through the same trials to the same home; but many of us have no habitual impression that there is any peculiar connection between us and them; we do not look on one another as parts and necessary parts of the same whole. No sooner however do we turn to this scripture, than God sets us right. He tells us that his church is not a mass of disjointed materials or polished stones, but a house; that his people are not only one in spirit, they are chosen from among men to accomplish one object and complete one design. There is a secret union, an unseen though real mutual dependence among them. Consistently with his plan, he could not do without one of them. The whole multitude would suffer if one were gone. Take away a small part of this building, the whole would be endangered. Or think of the material universe. Tell a philosopher that you are going to remove from it one petty globe, he would tell you that you will probably pull down the whole. "So hung together," he would say, "and nicely balanced, and dependent, are all its parts, I should scarcely dare to annihilate an atom." Just so with the church—every individual in it is chosen, and dealt with, and formed, and stationed, with a reference to the rest; every individual is probably needful for the rest. The parts of a house are different, but they all have their use, all answer their destined end; they are all connected one with another, and by their junction one with another and underneath

with the foundation, they form one whole. This is what the apostle means when, speaking of the church, he says that "the whole building is fitly framed together in Christ," closely jointed and carefully bound together; that believers are "builded together in Christ for an habitation of God."

O that we could always bear this in mind, brethren! We should not feel so independent one of another, and make so light one of another, as we are tempted to do now. "There is one," we should say and say it of our meanest brother in Christ, "there is one who is preparing for the same building wherein I am soon to be placed. He is to be in it and form a part of it. I know not where he will be in it, but this I know, that in some way or other I shall be connected with him and perhaps dependent on him. He will not be the foundation of the building, but he may be the very stone in it next to myself. I may owe to him under Christ, in a way that I cannot now comprehend, my security and some of my honour and joy."

III. We have now looked at the church as a house, but the text goes farther; it calls it *the house of God*.

There are three accounts on which any one may call a house his. He may be the builder of it, or he may be its owner and proprietor, or, if neither of these two, he may be its inhabitant, or he may be all three, and then it will be emphatically his, his to the exclusion of all other claimants. And for this three-fold reason is the glorified church said to be the Lord's.

He is *the builder* of this house. The plan of it is his, and so is the progress and completion. We look at the wide universe. We are told that God created it, and created it out of nothing, and created it by himself, none aiding him; and this we believe. It is just as true that his church above is of his own raising and creating, and we shall one day as fully believe it. Much as others seem to us now to have contributed to it, we shall then see that they have in fact contributed nothing except as God's instruments, no more than to the forming of the world. "We are his workmanship," says St. Paul. "The Lord hath founded Zion," says the psalmist. "The Lord doth build up Jerusalem."

He is also *the owner* of this house. He is building it for himself. "This people," he says, "have I formed for myself." "Fear not," he says to his church, "for I have redeemed thee;

I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." He delights in acknowledging his church as his, and contemplating it as his. He writes his name on it now in this world even while he is raising it, and conspicuously and gloriously will he make his name to shine on it when he has completed it in heaven.

And he too is *the great inhabitant* of this house. It is built for this very purpose, to be "a habitation of God through the Spirit." "Behold," says St. John, when speaking of it as the new Jerusalem, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them;" and this not for a short time or occasionally—"the throne of God," he adds, "shall be in it;" he will make it his palace, his permanent and fixed abode.

If you ask the meaning of this figure, brethren, you may easily discover it—you have only to ask what your home is to you. Something answering to this is the church to God; not indeed a refuge from winds and storms. "God sitteth above the water-floods." There are no storms that can reach him, and if there were, he would need no hiding-place from them. Your home is more to you than a refuge. If it is what a home ought to be, it is the seat of your comforts. You experience there a satisfaction which you feel no where else. Your heart clings to it when in it, and aches for it when away. Now transfer these feelings to God. When he says that his church is his house, he means that he loves his church and delights in it; rejoices to hold intercourse with his saints, esteems them his chief joy. "The Lord hath chosen Zion," says the psalmist; "he hath desired it for his habitation." "This is my rest for ever," answers God: "Zion delights and satisfies me now I have chosen it; my mind finds repose in it." "Here will I dwell," he adds, like one who has entered a house that pleases him; "here will I dwell; for I have desired it." "The Lord," we are told again, "taketh pleasure in his people." O wonderful truth, that a Being so holy and high, should find ought in us to delight him! Yet find it he does. All these figurative terms applied to his church are proofs that he finds it. Just as we delight in our houses and gardens, so does the living God delight in that church which he calls his house and his garden. Nay, he speaks of his church as though his chief delight were in it. He calls it his "banqueting house;" he talks of supping in it, as though even in heaven he turned to it for refreshment and joy.

What shall we say then to all this? *Let every one of us be anxious to get into this spiritual house*, to belong to this church of the living God.

“We are all in it,” some of you may say; “we all belong to it.” O brethren, deceive not yourselves thus. I have not been speaking of the outward, visible church of Christ. We are all in that, and O that we were all more thankful that we are in it! It is a great mercy to be in it. It is like being near an abundant and open feast when we are starving. And it is a great honour to be in it. It is an honour to bear even the name of Christians among our fellow-men. But this is quite a different thing to being in the invisible, real church of Christ. An outward thing, baptism, can place us in the one; but it must be something inward and spiritual to admit us into the other.

You remember what Paul said—“He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter.” We may say the very same now to you. He is not a Christian, which is one outwardly; neither is that baptism, which is outward in the flesh. There is a mental process, a spiritual baptism, to be gone through, before any man living can be a Christian indeed. No man comes naturally into this house of God; no man is born in it. No outward rite or ordinance, however sacred, can introduce him into it. O how blind must men be to the real nature of this house to think that it can! Why, brethren, some of the vilest men a God of patience ever bore with, have been circumcised and baptized men. The most enormous crime the earth ever groaned under, was committed by circumcised Jews, and, remember, by Jews who gloried in their Jewish privileges; who at the very time they were shouting, “Crucify him, crucify him,” would have shouted as readily, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are we.” And as for baptism, scarcely had it been instituted as a Christian rite, when two who had received it, are struck down with a lie on their lips by an angry God; and there a little after stands the faithful Peter declaring to another, “Thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”

Sacraments are emblems. They are outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace. To confound them with that grace itself, is as absurd as to say a picture is a man;

to contend that they are always accompanied with that grace, is to contradict the whole tenor of scripture, to cast aside common sense, to reason against undeniable and plain facts; and more—it is to shew that we have not enough love for our own souls or the souls of others seriously to ask, Are those souls safe? Here, alas! lies the root of all these errors. One near view of heaven and hell, a deep consciousness in the soul of the soul's guilty and lost condition, a broken heart, would do more to drive these errors out of us, than all the reasoning in the world. The man who knows what he is and whither he is going, does not despise ordinances; he reverences them for he reverences the God who has appointed them; but he dares not trust them. He reads this declaration in his Bible, "Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever," and he feels that he must become inwardly and spiritually a new and holy creature before he can form a part of that house. His prayer is, "Lord, make me a new creature. Enter my soul, dwell in me by thy Spirit, that so I may be a living member of thy church on earth, and have a name and a place in thy house in heaven."

SERMON LV.

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE CHURCH THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

ZECHARIAH VI. 12, 13.—"He shall build the temple of the Lord, even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory."

THIS is a prophecy of the Messiah. On the first view it may not appear such, but such doubtless it really is.

You remember that after their return from the Babylonish captivity, the Jews set about rebuilding their demolished temple. Owing to the difficulties they encountered, the work proceeded

but slowly, and at last was completely stopped. The people were consequently discouraged; they thought they should never complete it. But the Lord is a compassionate God. He often delivers us out of our fears, as well as out of our real troubles; and these disheartened Jews were not overlooked by him. To comfort them, and to encourage them still to keep in view the great work they had entered on, Zechariah is commanded to tell them, that notwithstanding all threatening appearances, the temple should assuredly be built, and built by those very hands which were now employed on it. "The hands of Zerubbabel," he says, "have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it."

To impress this message more deeply on their minds, and at the same time to lead their minds beyond it, the scene takes place, which is recorded in this passage. The prophet puts two crowns on the head of Joshua the high priest, and then speaks to him, not only as the raiser up of the desolated temple, but as a type of an enthroned Saviour, the builder of a spiritual and far more glorious structure. "Behold," he says, adopting in part the language of Isaiah, "Behold the man whose name is the Branch, and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord, even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory."

We collect from this scripture four truths—that God looks on his church as his temple, that the Lord Jesus is the builder of this temple, that it will be when completed a very glorious temple, and that the enthroned Saviour will have all the glory of it.

I. *The church is God's temple, "the temple of the Lord."*

By the church I mean all that the word imports in its highest and its widest sense—all God's real servants, all his believing, and pardoned, and sanctified people of all places and ages. These we must bring together in our imaginations into one body, and place them, when thus brought together, in heaven. We must then go a step farther, and look on them there under the character of a building. The text we were considering on the last sabbath, represented this building as God's house or dwelling place. But houses, you are aware, are of different kinds, and have different names applied to them according to the rank of the persons who occupy them. There is the cottage for the

poor man, and the mansion for the great man, and the palace for the king. And when God builds, his habitation shall have a name and character of its own—it is a temple. This figure then does not destroy the other. It only carries it a little farther and adds to its meaning. View the church simply as God's house, then we look on it as something which God dwells in, and rests in, and delights in: there is the idea of familiarity and of pleasure on God's part conveyed in the term. View it as God's temple, then a sacredness comes over it.

The house becomes, first, *a consecrated place*, a place appropriated and set apart for holy purposes. The glorified church in heaven, the term intimates, has been built up in heaven for Jehovah's peculiar use and honour. Sinners are taken there, it says, not mainly to be happy there, but to glorify God there; to answer the same purposes there that the temple answered at Jerusalem, and that churches answer in our own land. Hence it is said that "the Lord hath set apart" or consecrated "him that is godly for himself." "Ye," says St. Peter to the church, and says it, observe, just after he had called that church God's temple, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar" or appropriated "people." "He has predestinated us," says St. Paul, foreordained "us to the praise of his glory."

And there is the idea of *worship and devotion* connected with this term. It implies, not only that God designs his people to shew forth his praise in heaven, but that they do shew it forth there; they answer there the end for which they are taken there; God is served, and worshipped, and magnified, by them. A building on earth may be raised to God's glory, but if no worship ever goes on in it, we shall not long call it a sacred place; it will soon be desecrated and considered a common building. "But my house," says God, "is really my temple. I am adored and glorified in it. My servants serve me. My people in heaven not only sit at my feet, and see my face, and share my joy, they minister to me, they offer me every moment spiritual sacrifices. The loudest song that is sung here, comes from their burning lips; the noblest services that are done here, their hands perform. Angels and archangels serve me well, but not as these redeemed sinners serve me. In love, and gratitude, and praise, they outvie them all. I formed them for myself, and now at last they do indeed shew forth my praise."

II. But let us pass on to another truth—the *Lord Jesus is the builder of this temple*, the only builder of it.

You remember, brethren, when looking at the church as God's house, we were told that we must regard Christ as the foundation of it. It is said to be built up in him; he is called the chief corner-stone of it. Here, you observe, the part assigned him in the edifice is changed; he is described as the great builder of it. And this is the ordinary way of the inspired writers. Christ they know to be all in all. No one figure, they see, can ever set forth his importance. Therefore they apply figure after figure to him. They do not heed what we deem incongruities and contradictions. They call him now one thing and now another; they will call him any thing in order to represent him as he is, the sum and substance, the author and finisher, the beginning, middle, and end, of man's salvation. Now he is the foundation of the church, because the church rests on him, he sustains it and bears it up; and now, when another part of his glorious character and work is to be exhibited, he is its builder; "He shall build the temple of the Lord, even he shall build it." And this is exactly what he says of himself. In one and the same sentence he describes himself as standing in this double relation to his church. "Thou art the Christ," says Peter, "the Son of the living God." "Yes," he says, "I am, and upon this rock—my Messiahship, my divinity, myself—I will build my church."

There are three things the builder of a temple has to do.

1. *To form the plan of it.* He has to settle in his mind what its form and size shall be, and of what materials it shall consist. And this as to his church Christ has done.

We often speak as though this man and that man were saved, as it were, at random; as though God scarcely knew for whom he had made ready his glorious kingdom, or whether many or few would ever inhabit it. We make him a builder throwing stone on stone without plan or design. But this is not the fact. The whole spiritual edifice above has been from eternity in the divine mind. Every part of it has been thought over and determined on in that mind; nothing has been overlooked. Turn to the wide universe—all hangs together there, world on world, system on system. All clearly was formed on a pre-determined plan. There is design visible every where throughout it. It is one great whole. And look at the human frame, our bodies—

there is thought, and skill, and wisdom, visible in every part of them. They who know them the best, wonder the most at the contrivance and mind they manifest. And so is it in heaven. All there is ordered in all things. The happy men who are to live in it, the place each one is to fill, the blessedness he is to enjoy, the work he is to perform, the time when he is to leave the world and enter it—this was all settled before the sun ever rose or the stars ever shone. “Come,” will the great King of it one day say to his redeemed, “come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

2. A builder too has *to prepare his materials*, at least, the builder of a temple has. He does not find them prepared for him by nature, the wrought stone in the quarry and the carved beam in the forest. Nor can they prepare themselves. He is obliged to work on them, and often with much labour and pains, till they are fit for his purpose.

And we, brethren, are not naturally fit for heaven, nor can we make ourselves or one another fit for it. Some of us do not believe this, but the reason is plain—we do not know what heaven is. We do not know how holy a world it is, or we should never think of going there without being first prepared for it. We do not know how glorious a world it is, or we should not dream for one moment of preparing ourselves for it. The great Builder must do all. He who has prepared heaven for us, must prepare us for heaven. And by this, I mean more than that he must save us from condemnation and cleanse us from the guilt of sin by his blood, he must do all that is needful to be done within our hearts; he must deliver us from the power of sin by his Spirit; he must elevate us above our naturally low and base affections; he must form in us a capacity and meetness for heaven’s high work and joys. The first serious thought in the sinner’s mind, the first faint breathing of the soul after God, he is the author of; and the sinner’s last dying prayer, his last joyful song, the maturity of his faith and hope—it is all Christ’s work; he has wrought it all and all alone. Instruments indeed he has employed, but what are they? Instruments and nothing more. The chisel might as well say that it has squared the stone, or the axe that it has made ready the beam, as any minister, or any friend, or any man or angel, say of any one redeemed sinner in heaven, “I brought him here,” or “I made him meet to come.”

3. And one thing more a builder has to do—he *has to join his materials together*, to put each one of them into the place for which it is prepared. And this also is the work of Christ. He knows where every stone is to go, and when it is ready for its station, he takes it from the earth and lays it in it. He has in his mind the place he has made ready for every ransomed soul, and with unutterable joy he takes it thither. “Not here nor there,” he says to it as he leads it through the courts of the heavenly house, and it longs perhaps to rest here and there amid happy and adoring spirits; “we must go farther in; we must get nearer the mercy-seat.” He shews it at last its own place close by the throne of God, and the delighted soul, half-awed and wondering, finds itself in it. It is not only in the world where for years it has longed to be, it sees that it is in the very station in that world, where it can be the happiest and honour its God the most. The all-wise Architect “fitly frameth” the whole building together. All its materials are adapted one for another. All are united, all grow together, a holy, a majestic, and a glorious temple to the Lord. Consider its glory.

III. The text bears us out in asserting that *it really is a very glorious building*. It does not expressly say this, but it implies it. There is to be a glory result to Christ from it, and this glory is doubtless to proceed in part from something excellent and magnificent in the building itself.

And what a subject, brethren, opens itself to us here! The mind looks hither and thither, it strains itself to take in the glory of the ransomed church in a heavenly world, and yet after all what can it do? It is like looking at the glorious sun—we look and admire, but the view is too much for us; the sight becomes confused; we feel at last that we can discern nothing.

Does beauty make a building glorious, a noble plan and excellent workmanship? Is that a glorious fabric in which, the longer we gaze on it the more mind, and judgment, and taste, and power, we discover? O what so beautiful as the church of the first-born? what so perfect as its salvation and happiness? The blood of Christ has cleansed it; his Spirit has purified it; his righteousness is on it; it is “without spot, or blemish, or any such thing.” Taken from an unholy world, it is as pure as though sin had never come near it. And there is not a sorrow, any more than a stain, to be found in it. It shines in the

holiness and likeness of its Redeemer, and it exults in its Redeemer's joy.

We may bear in mind these two facts in reference to the glory of this temple—

1. *It is such, that it satisfies Christ himself.*

You know, brethren, how he loves his church, or rather you do not know. His love for it passes your knowledge, and all knowledge save his own. But you know that his love for it is great. And you know too that he has been long familiar with scenes of splendour and beauty. He dwells in a magnificence, compared with which all earthly pomp is meanness, and all earthly brightness darkness. He must have therefore very lofty conceptions of splendour and beauty. It is not a little magnificence, that will satisfy him. Now what does he think of his redeemed church? "Thou art all fair," he says to it; "there is no spot in thee." He is said greatly to "desire its beauty," to delight in it, to present it to himself "with exceeding joy." Well then may we say of this church that it is "all glorious." In heaven, brethren, we shall not only be what we ourselves wish to be, we shall be what the Lord Jesus, with his lofty mind and his intense love for us, wishes us to be. "We are satisfied," will be our language; and he, as he beholds our purity, and witnesses our happiness, and looks on our glory, even he will say, "And I too am satisfied. There is a glory here, which recompenses all my degradation and woe. I bought it for my church with my own precious blood, and as I now look on my church in possession of it, I feel that I did not pay for it too costly a price."

2. *This temple has occupied the mighty Jehovah far longer than any of his works*—from this fact also we infer its gloriousness.

We see a great glory in the sun as it shines in its brightness, and great beauty in the moon, and as we look on the stars, we often feel that the heavens do indeed declare the glory of God, that we really are in a magnificent universe. And then sometimes our minds travel farther, and we think how splendid this universe must be to a seraph or angel who can look perhaps at one glance, if not throughout it, yet far enough in it to see many suns and many moons in all their radiance, as we see ours, and see them in their mutual connection and dependence. But, brethren, this universe we so admire, was formed, as it were, in

a moment. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." But as for his temple in heaven, no moment, no word, built that. Ages have been employed in building it; all the perfections of the Godhead have been called forth to raise and adorn it; it has cost Jehovah, if we may dare use such language, the expenditure of more wisdom, and love, and power, than all his other works. It is the perfection of his workmanship. It is the achievement of a glorious Omnipotence, and we may conclude therefore that it must itself be glorious, inconceivably glorious, glorious beyond all other created objects. God calls it "his glory." He speaks of it as though he would point to it in heaven and say to his universe, "If you would see what my right hand can accomplish, look there."

IV. We have yet another truth to notice—the *Lord Jesus will have all the glory of this temple*. He ought to have it, the text intimates, for he built it; and he shall have it, it says; "He shall bear the glory."

There are two reasons why Christ is so little honoured on earth as the Author of his people's salvation—the greatness of that salvation is not known, and we do not see how entirely the work is his. We are like men looking at a part only of a magnificent building, and that building only half finished and more than half hidden, encumbered too with scaffolding and sordid rubbish. We cannot enter into the architect's design, we do not see how much he has accomplished, we have no idea of the difficulties he has overcome. Besides, looking at the axes, and hammers, and tools of iron, that are strewed around, we are ready to think that he has had many helpers in the work, has wrought chiefly by others, has actually done little perhaps with his own hand. But the time will come when all the scaffolding from the heavenly building shall be swept away. We shall see it in its perfect beauty and majesty, and our hearts, brethren, will glow with admiration of the mighty Architect. And then as we are ready to look around for his fellow-workmen, for the men who laboured on his design and realized his project; as we are ready to divide our praise between the great Redeemer and his ministering angels and servants, "I did it all myself," he will say. "Of the people there was none with me."

From the bottom to the top of it, I erected it. My hands laid the foundation of this house, my hands have also finished it." And what will be the answer of prophets and apostles, of ministers and angels, of those who once seemed to be something in this building? "We were really nothing," they cry; "we were merely the instruments in his mighty hands."

I said at the outset of this subject, that God's design in this building was his own honour, that it is erected in heaven to glorify him and shew forth his praise; and in this way this object is attained—the salvation of the church is made so glorious, that great praise must flow somewhere on account of it, he who is the Author of it must be magnified; and then it has been brought to pass in such a way, every thing leading to it has been arranged in such a manner, it has been so planned and so executed, that God's hand is seen every where in it. No one can possibly divide with him the honour of accomplishing it. It will be plainly seen to be his work, as entirely his as the creation of the light or the forming of the worlds. Hence the psalmist says, "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory." We shall mean something at last when we say, "Thine is the glory." It will be our everlasting employment and delight to say, "Thine be the praise."

And what still sweetens this thought, is the fact that it is God in Christ we are thus to magnify and adore; no unseen, unknown God, but a manifested Jehovah; he who once trod our earth and still wears our form. "They shall hang upon him," says the prophet, "all the glory of his Father's house." They shall trace it all to the Man Christ Jesus. "He shall build the temple of the Lord, even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory."

Brethren, shall you and I ever see this temple? Shall we ever form a part of it? Is there a place for us in heaven? Is Christ making us ready for it? Questions such as these must surely rise up in our minds at the close of a subject like this. O that every one of us would seriously endeavour to answer them! And we must not stop here.

Is Christ the builder of God's temple? Then this text calls on all of us *really to regard him as such*.

You must so regard him, who are waiting to be carried up to your places in the lofty walls of this temple. The stone, brethren,

does not rend itself from the parent rock, it does not transport itself from the quarry to the building, it does not hew and fashion itself for the station it is to fill. The builder separates it, the builder removes it, the builder squares and forms it. O remember what that great Builder who "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," has done for you, and give him anew to-day your thanks and praise!

And you who would be stones in this building, may learn here how to become so. You are trying perhaps to carry yourselves to it and prepare yourselves for it. You are labouring in various ways to get to heaven and make yourselves meet for heaven, and you have been labouring thus for a long time. With what success? If you are really in earnest, you will say, with none at all. Now and then for a little while you have thought all has been going on well, but you have soon discovered that nothing has been going on, that you are like men building a wall one day, which falls down the next. And you think this strange; but look at this scripture—it explains it all. It tells you plainly where your error lies. "The man whose name is the Branch, he," it says, "shall build the temple of the Lord;" but you say, "No, we will build it ourselves." You have blindly taken the work of Christ on you, and it is a work you can never perform. You are no more equal to it, than a lifeless stone is able to place itself on some rising wall. Perhaps your fruitless efforts have almost taught you this. Bless God if they have. They have then not been fruitless. They have been the wedges and levers in his mighty hand, to sever you from nature's rock. What you need now is to betake yourselves in conscious deformity and helplessness to Christ. Lie down before him and say, "Lord, help me. I am not fit for the temple thou art building; I cannot make myself fit for it; but thou canst do any thing, and any thing with me. Lord, turn unto me and have mercy upon me. Work on me by thine omnipotent grace. O for thy name's sake make me a living stone in thy glorious house."

Again—is the church the temple of the Lord, and the glorious temple of the Lord? Then this text bids us *cherish in our minds a high reverence and love for it.*

If God so loves his church, as to call it his house, to dwell in it and delight in it; if he deems it so sacred as to call it his temple; if he sees so much grandeur and beauty in it as to

peak of its glory; surely, brethren, we may find in it something to love, something to delight in, something to revere and admire. And yet what is the fact? Many of us never think of it, and the love of others for it is growing cold. We love our own church; we have learnt of late to cleave to it more than ever. This is well. But what is the church of England? England's greatest blessing, I know, but it is a part only of the church of Christ. It is not Christ's kingdom on the earth, it is only one province of that kingdom. It is no more to be compared with that heavenly church of which you have been hearing to-day, than the tabernacle in the wilderness with the dwelling place of God on Zion; or than the outer court of that stately dwelling place with the holy of holies where God shone forth within; or than a field of tares and wheat growing side by side on the earth's surface, is to be compared with the wheat of a thousand harvests from a thousand fields, treasured up without a single tare in the paradise of God. The point to be aimed at by us is to love our own church well; to love the universal church on earth better; and the church in heaven best of all. The first is a branch of Christ's great family; the second is that family itself of one generation, with many strangers in it, who are eventually to be severed from it; the last is that family in all its generations, collected and brought together into one happy home with not a single stranger left.

O brethren, we know not what the glorified church in heaven is. God has been carrying to it for ages all that he has seen on earth worth preserving. The riches of all his churches have been for thousands of years flowing into it, and will flow into it till its glory is full. It is "the place of God's sanctuary," that he has beautified. It is "the place of his feet," that he has promised to make glorious. It is "the house of his glory," of which he has said, "I will glorify it." It is his "glorious church." He can hardly speak of it without speaking of its glory. O let us try to lift up our thoughts to it, to lift up our hearts to it, to comfort ourselves amidst our private troubles and the distractions of the church on earth, with the prospect of soon being in the midst of its splendours and joys.

SERMON LVI.

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD BUILT AMIDST DIFFICULTIES.

ZECHARIAH IV. 6, 7.—“This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain; and he shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it.”

LET us turn once again, brethren, to the subject we were lately contemplating—the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem after the return of the Jews from their captivity.

The view we then took of it carried our thoughts to heaven. The temple itself was held forth to us as an emblem of God’s redeemed church in glory, and Zerubbabel and Joshua, the builders of it, as types of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Saviour of that church, the author of its redemption and glory. This scripture also directs our minds upward, but not till the conclusion of it. It exhibits to us, in the first instance, the church on earth, and its Redeemer fashioning it and preparing it on earth for a better world. These four points are contained in it—first, the seeming difficulties in our great Builder’s way; secondly, the ease and completeness with which he overcomes them; thirdly, the means whereby notwithstanding them he carries on his work; and then, lastly, one of the effects produced by the completion of it.

I. We begin with *the seeming difficulties in our Lord’s way.*

You remember how the building of the second temple was obstructed. Solomon raised his goodly structure in quiet, with all around him eager to aid him, and even the very heathen his helpers. But Joshua and Zerubbabel had difficulty after diffi-

culty to overcome. The Jews were now an impoverished people. Just returned from a seventy years' captivity, they were a disheartened people. Enemies too surrounded and harassed them, so that they were often obliged to labour with the tool in one hand and the sword in the other. Hindrances also sprung up where they might have been least expected. Intrigue and party spirit were going on among themselves, some of the leaders of the people adhering to the faithful Joshua, while others were employing every art they were masters of to thwart and retard him.

And turn to the Lord Jesus. O what difficulties were there in his way when he first undertook to build God's temple in heaven! They are compared here to a mountain rising up directly in a traveller's path, huge, immoveable, impassable.

He had, first, *to introduce sinners into heaven*; to bring those near to God, who were among the farthest from him; to snatch the brand from the burning, and to place it, no more a brand, but a living, a pleasant and fruitful tree, in the paradise of heaven. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," said God. The Lord Jesus had to alter the thing which was gone forth from God's lips, and to do this without impeaching his faithfulness or tarnishing his glory. Many souls that had sinned and grievously sinned, were to live, and live in the highest honour and blessedness.

And then, in the next place, he had *to prepare sinners for heaven*. And the mind gets bewildered, brethren, as it looks at the magnitude of this work. It appears to some of us a light thing to fit a soul for a heavenly world, but did we know what that world is and what we are, we should say, not one of us ever can be fitted for it. It is a holy world, no unclean foot has ever trodden on it; but we are all over defiled; our hearts "are full of evil;" we are "desperately wicked," and we are naturally content to be so. Nay worse—we are determined to be so; we resolutely set ourselves against every thing which is likely to make us otherwise; we love sin and cleave to it as though it were our life. This is the state of every living man when Christ first lays his hand on him, and it continues his state in some measure to the very last. The Lord his Redeemer has to work to the very last against the bias of nature and the power of nature's lusts.

And consider *how many of such men he has to work on and*

change before his task can be completed. He has to bring "many sons unto glory." God's temple in heaven is to be a magnificent building. It will contain more stones than were ever piled one on another in any earthly structure, and the Lord Jesus with his single hand has to prepare them all.

And then remember *where this work is to be done*; not in a quiet heaven with all around rejoicing in it and eager to carry it on, but at a distance from heaven, amid strife and confusion; in a world where there is every thing to obstruct and really nothing to aid it.

And it is to be accomplished too *against all the powers of darkness*. It is to be done in Satan's own kingdom, where his power is strongest, and where all the force and deceit he can employ will be put forth to the greatest advantage against it.

And *it cannot be done in an hour, or a day, or a year*. No one mighty effort of omnipotence is to bring it to pass. Many years had Joshua and Zerubbabel to labour on their temple; forty and six years did the Jews labour afterwards in enlarging and adorning it, and in one of their conversations with Christ, they bring forward this circumstance to shew the greatness and difficulty of the work; but the Lord Jesus has been employed six thousand years already on the temple he is raising, and it is not yet finished. The number of his elect is not yet accomplished, nor his kingdom and his glory come. There is needed therefore here a patience that is well nigh infinite, as well as a power that is boundless. There must be brought into action here a love that never tires, as well as an arm that never droops. As we think of these things, well may we say with the disciples, "Who then can be saved?" These great mountains never can be passed. We can see neither the summit, nor extent, nor number, of them. All that we know is, that they lie in their fearful magnitude between us and heaven, and we cannot get over them. So say appearances; but look to our second point—

II. *The ease and completeness with which the Redeemer overcomes the difficulties before him.*

This is strongly expressed in the text, more strongly however in the abrupt language of the original, than in our translation. If we omit the words in italics, we shall get the real force of the passage; "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel a plain."

"Who art thou?" There is no surprise or ignorance implied in this question. It is not asked as though the Redeemer had met with some difficulty in his way, which he had not anticipated or did not understand. There is something like derision and contempt in it. The question expresses at once his own dignity, and the insignificance in his sight of the obstacles opposed to him; his own almighty power and their utter impotence. "Who art thou, O great mountain? Something which is to turn me aside in my career of glory; or which I am to stand still and examine, and then gird up my strength to get over? No; before me thou art a plain, nothing, no mountain at all. I pass over thee without a pause or an effort." The text is an echo of David's language in the second psalm. He is speaking of the enemies of Christ. "He that sitteth in the heavens," he says, "shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." And then he adds, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Observe, these scriptures do not say there are no enemies, no mountains, no difficulties. They do not make the salvation of the church that light thing which some of us make it. On the contrary, they suppose it to be in itself a work of the utmost difficulty. But then Christ, they tell us, is more than equal to it; he is "mighty to save;" he can prepare his people for heaven and carry them there, in spite of every thing; and do it without an effort, with composure, with as much ease as though the world aided instead of opposed him, and the powers of hell had no existence. "There is the mountain," the text says, "and it is a great one; you cannot remove it nor cross it; but before Zerubbabel it is a plain."

And here in truth, brethren, lies one of the hardest lessons we have to learn in practical Christianity—to see the difficulties of salvation, and not be discouraged by them; to see the hills before us and around us, and yet to feel sure that the Lord will carry us over them. It is an easy thing to treat these obstructions as visionary and say, "I do not heed them;" but to believe them to be real and feel them to be real, and yet to say, "Notwithstanding them, I shall be at last in heaven"—this is not easy. This is one of the triumphs of faith. It is like saying, "I have rivers to pass through, but they shall not overflow me; I have fire to walk through, but the fire shall not burn me." And who can say this? None but the man who has his Redeemer's omnipotence in his sight, and has learnt to trust him.

III. We come now to another part of our subject—*the means whereby the Lord Jesus carries on his great work.*

This work, you remember, is the salvation of his church, represented to us here under the image of building a temple. It is intimated that notwithstanding all opposition, he will in the end completely accomplish this. The top-stone is to be brought forth by him and put on—a clear proof that every other stone is in its place; that no one soul is left out of heaven, which God has set apart to enjoy and praise him there. Our object now must be to ascertain by what means our Lord will effect this.

We can tell at once how he has accomplished a part of it. “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities;” “he bare our sins in his own body on the tree;” “he died the just for the unjust”—that explains the way in which he brings us to God. But the question is, how does he prepare us for God? how does he fit us for the heaven he has thus wonderfully opened to us?

The text tells us that he first throws from him all mighty instruments, all powerful weapons, every thing in fact that seems necessary for the carrying on of his design. Here is an immense work to be performed, and performed amidst immense difficulties; requiring, we should have supposed, all the aid and strength for its performance, which could possibly be brought to bear on it. “I will employ none,” says Christ, “no powerful weapons, nothing which you deem needful.” “Not by might nor by power,” he says. He strips himself bare.

And here is greatness, brethren. We petty creatures, if we set about any thing, are obliged to call in to our aid numberless instruments. We are obliged to summon our fellow-creatures to help us; to combine together, and put forth all our united powers, to effect our purpose. We can do scarcely any thing without assistance, and are generally glad of assistance, let it come from what quarter it may. But not so Christ. “In saving my church,” he says, “I will work alone. I ask for no aid or helper. It suits not my greatness to work as you work, to make use of earthly might and power. I will work against earthly might and power. I will save my church with all the strength of the world against me. I, even I alone, will build the temple of the Lord, and I will build it so, that I and I alone shall bear the glory.”

And so it has been. Christianity has been established in the

world without the world's aid, by means which have seemed most unlikely to establish it. Its very existence in the world at this moment is one of the greatest moral wonders the world ever saw. And how has it been established in the hearts of some of you, in every heart where it really exists? In a way just as wonderful. No human hand ever put it there, or keeps it there now. You "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man." You did not make yourselves the children of God, nor do you keep yourselves his children. You are as sure as experience can make you, that all the world could of itself do nothing for you; nay, that you must be saved if you are saved at all, in opposition to the world rather than by it.

And let us try, brethren, to act on this. We cannot do so without continual effort. We are so accustomed to employ power and might, earthly means and carnal weapons, and to see them employed by others, that we can hardly believe any thing can be done without them, we are almost afraid to let them alone. But it is a main part of true godliness to rise above this natural feeling; to form a true estimate of human power and policy, human means and instruments; if not to make light of them, to feel that God can do without them, to distrust them. And we cannot carry this too far. We shall never carry it far enough till we have "no confidence in the flesh;" till we make the creature nothing, and Christ "all in all."

But we are still without an answer to our question. The text however supplies one. It says that the Lord Jesus fits us for heaven by means of his Spirit. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

And if we look back to the beginning of this chapter, we shall find the same truth taught us in an emblematical manner, by means of what we call a vision. A golden lamp, burning with seven lights, is set before the prophet. Attached to it is a bowl containing oil. From this bowl seven pipes go forth, carrying a supply of oil to the seven lights. On two sides of the bowl is an olive tree, the tree that in eastern countries produces oil; and, in the twelfth verse, you will find that these two olive trees overhang the bowl, and keep pouring out oil from their branches into it. Now what is the meaning of all this? We see the prophet, in the fourth verse, asking for an explanation of it; and the first part of the text before us is that explanation. "This is

the word of the Lord," says the angel unto him; "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit." "You see," he says, "those lights. No help of man is needed to keep them burning. No one takes to them their oil, or gives them their brightness. The olive trees do all for them. As long as they stand near the lamp and drop their oil into the bowl of it, that lamp will shine on unaided. So with my church, saith the Lord of hosts. It needs not man's arm to save it. I may make use of man in saving it, but look there—I do not need him. My Spirit alone can accomplish all my pleasure. I can build my temple in your desolate city, just as I brought your forefathers out of Egypt—by my own right hand and by my holy arm; just as I have now brought you out of Babylon—by my secret influence on the minds of men. I will build my glorious temple in my own glorious kingdom, not as you anticipate, by a visible putting forth of power and might, but by pouring secretly out on that rebellious world my grace and Spirit."

Observe then here how jealous God is for the honour of the Holy Ghost. He is not speaking of him, nor aiming to set forth his glory. He is speaking, as we see in the preceding chapter, of his servant, "the Branch." His object is to hold Christ forth to us as the Author of our salvation, and to give him the glory of it. And yet care is taken to bring the Holy Spirit to our minds. The work is traced to him as much as to the Lord Jesus himself. "He," says God, "my well beloved Son, shall build my temple;" but how? "By my Spirit," saith the Lord of hosts. And so, brethren, there is a blessed union and combination of the whole Godhead in our salvation. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, all concur in it. God in his whole nature, God in every character he sustains, is well pleased with it, is employed in it, is determined to be known and recognized as contributing towards it.

In looking therefore to the Lord Jesus as our Sanctifier, we must not overlook the Holy Spirit. He sanctifies us by this Spirit; and thus it is that the Spirit becomes needful for our salvation, as needful as Christ himself. Without him no flesh living can be saved. The lamp in the vision burns without the aid of man, but why? Because the olive trees are dropping their oil into it. Take those trees away, or cut off its connection with them, the lamp goes out. So, without the Spirit, what is man? What is the church? It is a lamp that will not burn; it

is a useless thing. It may be gilded, it may be of a beautiful form and workmanship, but it does not answer its intended purpose, the end is lost for which it was formed, and it shall be thrown aside. "Reprobate silver shall men call it, because the Lord hath rejected it." O brethren, pray for the Spirit. It is not your comfort only, that depends on your having it, you will lose heaven without it. The fellowship of the Holy Ghost is as needful for you as the love of God or the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. We have yet one thing more to notice in the text—*the effect which will be produced by the completion of Christ's work.*

God's present dealings with our world will not go on for ever. There is a day coming when all his purposes of mercy towards it will be accomplished. The last sinner that he means to take from it to heaven, will be taken, and the Redeemer's work in it will be finished.

The completion of this work the text speaks of under the figure of bringing forth and putting on the top or head-stone of a building. This, in eastern countries, was generally done with much ceremony and in the presence of many beholders. Imagine then a building before you, which has been going on century after century, with numberless spectators gazing on it, and all taking the deepest interest in it; all glowing with love towards him who is the builder of it, sharing as far as they can his labour, admiring his work, entering into its design, and longing with all the powers of their souls for its completion. Conceive the moment at last come. That must have been an hour of wonderful joy to the Saviour, when, bowing his head on the cross, he said, "It is finished;" but think of the hour when he shall bring into heaven the last of his redeemed, and say, "It is finished;" when he shall pass through the hosts of his angels, and stand on the summit of his glorious temple, and put on the last stone of it, and say, "I have done." The text however speaks not of his joy; it speaks rather of the joy of the beholders. I say "the joy," for though the shoutings described in it may be considered as the burstings forth of admiration and praise, and doubtless are such, yet joy seems to be the strongest feeling expressed in them. "The sons of God," we are told, "shouted for joy" at the creation of our world. Ezra tells us

that the people "shouted aloud for joy" when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem. "They shall rejoice," says the prophet in this chapter, "as they see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel." The progress of the building shall give them pleasure; what then its completion? If there were songs among the angels when the Lord first entered the world in a lowly disguise to save his church in it, how will they sing when its salvation is accomplished? If there is joy now in heaven over a sinner that repenteth, over one poor child of the dust shedding the tear of bitterness in humiliation and pollution, O what will be the joy in heaven over ten thousand times ten thousand sinners, raised far above all pollution and humiliation, standing before the very throne of Jehovah, with not a sin left among them all, nor a stain nor a tear? And those sinners themselves—what must they feel and what must they say? There are moments, brethren, when even on earth we do not know what to feel or say. Our sense of God's mercy towards us is so great, that it well nigh overpowers us. All that comes from us is some abrupt exclamation of joy and praise, and that repeated again and again. The text says that something like this shall take place in heaven. Our songs there, it intimates, will be no cold, artificial praises. They will come gushing out from hearts that are overflowing. They will be "shoutings," shoutings of "Grace, grace." Now and then for a moment wisdom and power may be our song as they were on earth, but this will not last long; we shall feel that we owe more to grace than to any thing else and all the splendour, and happiness, and employments, of heaven will not keep grace from our thoughts. It was of goodness and mercy, that the Jews sang, when they shouted for joy at the foundation of their temple; it will be of the same mercy, that we shall sing when we sing in heaven.

With such a prospect before us, well may we ask with this prophet, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" It will end, brethren, in this glorious day of great things. The beginnings of grace now in your hearts, some of them so slight and others so painful, shall end in this perfection of grace. From your lips shall one day burst forth this exulting song. Even you shall see this top-stone laid, and you shall shout with angels and archangels, "Grace, grace, unto it." Fear neither for yourselves, this text says to you, nor for the church of God. With those mountains before you, well might you fear for yourselves

were you left to your own power and wisdom, but you are not left in any way to yourselves. No power or wisdom of yours is needed for your salvation. It is the power of Christ that is to keep you; it is the power of Christ that is to save you; it is before him those mountains are to become a plain. Christ and his grace are to be your song in heaven, and why? Because Christ and his grace are now your strength on earth. Regard them as your strength. Try to feel like men who have a mercy that is boundless, to hope in; and an arm that is omnipotent, to sustain and preserve them.

And as for the church of God, let us learn, brethren, to be ashamed of our fears concerning it. We grieve perhaps at the indifference towards it we see in many around us, we grieve still more at the enmity the world is every where manifesting to it; and we should not have Christian hearts, if we did not grieve over these things; but of what moment are they? To the men who indulge them, of fearful moment; this enmity and this indifference must be answered for; but to Christ they are of no moment at all. Were they multiplied tenfold, they could not stop, or hinder, or trouble, him for a moment in the great work he is carrying on. He would still go on building his church in majesty and might. All they can do is to make his might the more conspicuous, and his majesty the more glorious. Churches indeed have fallen, some crumbled down by the corruptions and indifference within themselves, and some thrown down by the violence of their enemies. Other churches may fall, and our own church among them; yes, even our Zion may at last be a wilderness, and our Jerusalem a desolation; our holy and our beautiful houses where our fathers and we have praised God, may be burned up with fire, and all our pleasant things may be laid waste; but what then? The church of Christ shall still stand fast. The glory of England will be gone, but not the glory of the everlasting Saviour. As we stand contemplating the ruins around us, and are ready to think the cause of Christ buried beneath them; as devils in hell are triumphing, and wicked men on earth are rejoicing, and angels in heaven are wondering, there will still sit the great King serene in his majesty, and his command to us will be to be serene too; "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." He will point to his church in heaven shining brightly as before, and while he lays

stone on stone on its glorious walls, he will once more say to us, "My hands have laid the foundation of this house; my hands shall also finish it."

SERMON LVII.

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE DUTY OF PLEASING GOD.

HEBREWS XI. 5.—"Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."

THIS is said of Enoch. It is not my intention however to consider the words with any particular reference to him and his wonderful translation, but to preach to you as plain a sermon as I can, on the duty, or rather the privilege, of pleasing God—a simple subject, but the Lord of all power and grace can make it useful to us, even to the oldest and the wisest.

Let us enquire, first, whom we are to please; then, how we may please him; and then, why we should aim to please him rather than any one else.

I. If we ask *whom we are to please*, reason, uninstructed by revelation or experience, would immediately say ourselves, or if reason did not say so, feeling would. We accordingly find that man, as soon as he begins to act, acts solely with a view to his own gratification. It would never enter his mind to act otherwise were he left alone. But then none of us are left alone. We are mixed up with our fellow-men, and are trained from our earliest infancy more or less to please them. We teach one another this. The social feelings of our nature as they are called forth, lead to this. In the estimation of half the civilized world, it is the highest excellence we can aim at, to

aim at this; for what is the good breeding of the world, its high cultivation and polish? It is so to demean ourselves, as to give no offence to any one, but pleasure and satisfaction to all.

And these two things, pleasing ourselves and pleasing our fellow-men, we contrive to carry on together. They do indeed clash at times, but for the greater part we make them accord very well one with the other, and indeed help forward each other. We please the world, and in doing so, we please ourselves, for we gain something that we desire from the world by pleasing it—if nothing more, its good opinion, its favour and smiles.

But God comes in and disturbs all this. “Please me,” says self. “Please me,” says the world; and while we are striving to obey both, there is a voice from heaven, which says, “Neither must be obeyed: you must approve yourselves to me.” There appears before us a third competitor for our powers of pleasing; one of whom we never thought, and to whom not a feeling or principle of our nature inclines us to listen. Nay, every principle and feeling of our nature disinclines us to listen to him, and that so strongly, that in our natural state we never please him, or really try to please him. We talk about it but we never do it. So perverse are we, that we cannot do it. “They that are in the flesh,” says the scripture, “cannot please God.”

You see then, brethren, that we have no merely moral, half-heathen duty before us; it is a Christian duty. It is one which nature and reason will never bring a man to practise. We must feel the converting and constraining power of the gospel of Christ and the Spirit of Christ in order to practise it. And, like every thing else to which the gospel gives birth, it is a high thing. To please any one is, you are aware, to give him pleasure; and to please God is to give God pleasure. It is nothing less than for worms of the dust to meet the wishes and gratify the mind of the great Lord of all. A high thing indeed! a strange, wonderful thing! And how is it to be accomplished? This is our next question.

II. We are to enquire *how we are to please God.*

We must begin *with accepting the offers of his grace.*

We know that in order to please a fellow-creature, we must fall in with his disposition and character. If he is a man of a kind disposition, we must on no account repulse his kindness,

but yield ourselves up to it, and let him do us all the good he will. Now the great God of heaven is a God of kindness, of infinite kindness towards us. There has been enmity between him and us, and his love has been as it were driven back and half buried within his own mind; but he has provided a Mediator to make peace between us, and he sends us through that Mediator offers, not of reconciliation only, but large and magnificent offers of unspeakably large blessings. He tells us that he is ready to let his love flow out towards us in its utmost abundance. "Here is pardon for you," he says; "here is peace; here is my love for you, my presence, my likeness, my joy, my kingdom. Look through my universe—there is every thing for you, that is worth your having." Now to please him is to accept these offers. It is to let him see that we value his kindness and care for his blessings. It is to indulge God, if I may so speak, in the highest joy of his soul; to become willing objects for the exercise of his dearest attribute. "He delighteth in mercy." To please him is to come within the range of his mercy; to lie down before him and say, "Lord, thou shalt be as gracious to me as thou wilt."

Again—to please God, *we must conform ourselves to his mind and will*. This is clear. No one can be pleased with us, if we are continually differing with him and quarrelling with all he says and does. To please a father, his children must fall in with his plans for them and his ways; and to please a master, his servants must follow his commands. So to please God, we must accommodate ourselves to God; we must become like-minded with him. And this will shew itself by our ceasing to be angry and discontented with his dealings with us; and still more clearly by our efforts to do his will. He pleases God the most, who, after reconciliation with him, places himself the most entirely in God's hands, and lies the most quiet there; and he too, who strives the most after the holiness which God loves; it is the prodigal, who after he gets into his Father's house, not only eats of his Father's feast and wears the robe his Father has put on him, but says the most sincerely and readily, "Father, what wilt thou have me to do? Give me any work or any command thou pleasest, I am ready to do it. It will delight me to do it. The lowest office in thy house is too good for one like me. I had rather have it than the highest in any other."

Pleasing God, this apostle tells us, is the same as walking

with God; for this text is his interpretation of the Spirit's testimony concerning Enoch, that he "walked" with him; and to walk with God, we must go the same way with him, and be of the same mind. The whole course of our life must move in a blessed harmony with his mind and will. There must be what this same apostle calls "a walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," a walking suitably to him; in such a way as he himself would walk, could he be in such a situation as ours.

But further—to please God *we must aim to please him supremely, far above all.*

I began, you remember, with saying that naturally we seek to please ourselves. This is altogether evil, and we must altogether cease from it; but that pleasing of our fellow-men into which we next fall, is not to be entirely cast aside. God's creatures are formed to receive pleasure one from another, and to communicate pleasure one to another. It is doubtless so in heaven, and it ought to be so on earth. This very apostle says, "Let every one please his neighbour." "As for me," he says again, "I please all men in all things."

Pleasing others then, we see, is not in itself wrong; but it may become wrong, and in these two ways—we may seek to please men more than God; this is giving the creature God's place, setting him up above God: and we may seek to please men by falling in with their evil desires and ways; and this is taking part with the creature against God. The question is easily settled. Do I want to know when I may please my fellow-men? The answer is, Always, when in so doing I displease myself only; never, when in so doing I offend God. The worst is, we can seldom please men without offending God. The world is an evil world, at enmity with its great Creator, and it will not be long on good terms with us, unless we too take up arms and join it in its enmity. Hence to please God, we must in most cases put the world underneath our feet and cast aside all hope of pleasing it. We must act from a higher principle than a desire of pleasing it. Our first, supreme desire must be to approve ourselves in God's sight. This same apostle who could become "all things to all men," bend down to them and gratify them to the very utmost when only he and they came into competition, his pleasure and their pleasure—what does he say and how does he act when they and God come into competition? "Do I seek to please men?" he says.

“No; for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. The thing is impossible. No man can be the servant of so high and holy a Master, and yet the willing slave of so low and sinful a world.” And as for his conduct, to see what that was, look not at him as he went about among the Jews and the heathen, exposing himself willingly to their hatred and violence; follow him into the church of Christ, look at him among his fellow-disciples and apostles. Less in his own estimation than the least of them, he withstood the highest among them when they forgot what they owed their Lord; he would not give place, no, not for an hour, to any of them, when they wanted to exalt any thing above Christ. In all that concerned his Master’s honour he was as unbending, as he was yielding in every thing that concerned his own.

The Christian’s situation among his fellow-men is indeed a painful one. The grace of God within him strengthens his love for them and his desire of gratifying them; it makes it a sore trial to him to give them pain; he could well nigh lay down his very life to please them; but please them he cannot and dares not; his God comes in the way. This will be altered in heaven. There is no variance between God and any of his creatures there. Our social feelings may have there their full flow. We may please all around us to the extent of their desire, and yet at the same time the great Lord of all be pleased.

III. Let us come now to our third question—*why we should thus seek to please God rather than any one else.*

1. *It is easier to please him.*

This may seem strange. In general the more exalted any being is, the more difficult it is to give him pleasure: but not so in this case. God, the highest of all beings, is at the same time so much above all beings in love and graciousness, that his heart is more open than any heart. The way to it is easier than to any other. Only let us once accept the offers of love he has made us in his Son, and we, worms of the dust, can please him; any thing that we offer to him, will be acceptable in his sight; the mere desire to please him will give him pleasure. Does this need explanation? You who are parents, can explain it. Is it difficult for a child to put pleasure into a father’s heart? Does a mother require much from her infant to afford her delight? But what is a father’s or a mother’s love

to the love of the great God for us? As a shadow to a substance. His mighty love for us then makes it easy for us to please him.

But turn to the world. It is hard work to please that. What a multitude there is in it to gratify! and a multitude of different minds and humours; every one wanting to be gratified in his own way and at all costs, regarding you as just nothing but the mere instrument of his pleasure, and never caring or thinking that there are others who want to make you their instrument also. We may sacrifice ourselves on the world's altar, but, alas! we shall gain nothing; the greater part of the world will be angry because the sacrifice has not been made for them only or as they would have it made.

And then what a weathercock is the mind of man! How light and mutable! What pleases him to-day, he is tired of to-morrow, and offended with the day after. The same people who followed our Lord with hosannahs, were soon afterwards crying, "Away with him: crucify him." The Galatians loved Paul; they would, if possible, have plucked out their own eyes and given them unto him; but wait a little—they prefer now to that noble apostle any low-minded pretender who will flatter and court them. The truth is, half the men we mix with are mere children in their likings and dislikings. They will long for a thing and clamour for a thing till they get it, and then after a little cast it away, and clamour for something else. Weary indeed will he soon be, who has such children to please. But look upwards. He who seeks to please God, has only one to please, one instead of multitudes; and he one who is considerate and merciful, and never requires us to hurt ourselves in order to please him, and is always of one mind. That which pleases him once, will please him for ever. If he delights in us now, he will delight in us always. The mind of God, like God himself, is unchangeable, "without variableness or shadow of turning."

2. *It is better* to please God than any one else, more for our advantage.

Think how little man can do for us, even if he is disposed and continues so, to do his best. Our greatest sorrows he can do little indeed to lighten, and our heaviest wants he can do nothing at all to supply. We cling to him as though he were all in all to us; an hour will come when we shall feel him to be

a shadow. Look at man, brethren, when you are endeavouring to please him, and ask yourselves what he is. He is only breathing dust, and will soon be as unable to help you, to delight or offend you, as the sand which the winds of yesterday swept from your path. He will be gone you know not whither.

But think what God is. He is that God who made heaven and earth, and who could in a moment unmake them, bring them all into nothing again. He governs all things. He has the whole world and all that it contains, at his disposal, life and death, heaven and hell. He can give us whatsoever he will, and withhold from us whatsoever he will. If he says to us, "Be blessed," blessed we shall be, though millions were to labour to make us wretched: if he says to us, "Be cursed," the whole universe could not take that curse off us, nor bring us from that hour one moment's happiness. And think what this God is to you. He is the God of all your mercies. You live in him and move in him. He has done more for you already than was ever done for angels in heaven, and he is able and willing to do more. And recollect too what he will be to you soon. He is coming in the clouds of heaven to be your Judge. It will rest with him to send you to everlasting misery, or take you to everlasting happiness. We know not what it is to please this great God, or what to displease him. "Who knoweth the power of his wrath?" Who knows the might of his love? You know something of both, who have felt yourselves sinners and have really found his mercy. You know, in some measure, how miserable God can make a man and how happy. "In his favour," you feel, "is life;" in his displeasure you have felt there is death. And all this bids you seek to please him. It reasons with you as Christ reasoned with the Jews. If they were to fear God rather than men, because he could inflict on them so much greater destruction; so you are to please God rather than men, because he can confer on you so much greater blessedness. The utmost man can give you, you will soon call nothing; God can give you all things, and is willing to give them.

3. *It is more ennobling* to please God than to please any one else. The effort to please him elevates the soul; seeking to please others debases it.

Would you raise the minds of your children, you place them with persons of noble minds, and keep them as far as you can

from the low and mean. Would you tell a painter or a mechanic how to rise to eminence in his art, you bid him turn away from all inferior models and study and imitate the very highest. So is it in this case. Studying the minds of our fellow-men only and bending our powers unceasingly to accommodate ourselves to them, is to keep our own minds in the dust. It is putting on them the world's chain, and fastening them down to the world's level. But let the soul once look upward and say, "I must please that lofty Being who is exalted there, I must conform myself to his high mind and will;" the soul makes an effort to rise up from the dust, and God blesses that effort, and the soul does rise up, and as that effort goes on, it rises higher and higher. We become like God by seeking to please him. By keeping him constantly before us, we are changed into his image. This is not theory. I may appeal to every-day facts. Take the poor cottager whose heart God has touched, and taught to seek his favour. Apparently with every thing around him to depress him, there is often an elevation in that man's mind, which constrains us to wonder at him. He has risen to a loftiness of thought and feeling, which we can scarcely understand. And it is his piety alone, which has raised him, his simple and earnest desire to please his Lord. And then look at some of the world's great men, men who live on the world's favour and applause. How low do we frequently see them sink! We marvel at the littleness they betray, and pity them for their meanness. And think of the Lord Jesus. What gave to his character its mysterious elevation? It was mainly this—his unceasing, his soul-consuming desire and effort to be well pleasing in his Father's sight.

4. Hence we may observe that a supreme desire to please God *conforms us more than any thing else to Christ our Lord.*

He "pleased not himself," the scripture says. As we read his history, we never suspect him of having done so. It was not his own gratification, that brought him out of his Father's world and bosom, and kept him in our world amid pollution and sorrow. He sought not his own honour here, he did not his own works, he would not speak even his own words. And a careful reader of his history will never suspect him of having been a pleaser of men. Strong and tender in his love, shewing kindness to all and affection past understanding to some, he yet seems to have been always impelled by some higher principle

than mere kindness or affection; and he himself tells us what that principle was. He points upwards to his Father and says, "I do always those things that please him." He too, before his glorious translation, left us, like Enoch, this testimony of himself, "that he pleased God."

Now, brethren, there is a blessed resemblance between Christ and his people. They have the same spirit that he had, and it is their joy and delight to have it. We say that it forms their character, they feel that it is a main part of their happiness. We have only then to place before them the conduct of their Lord, and they say at once, "Let it be ours." With others we might reason the matter. We might say, If the Lord Jesus with his holy mind would not please himself, will you do it with such a mind as yours? His love for men was intense, but it did not master him. He died for them, but he would not seek to please them. Will you allow your poor, cold love for them, or fear of them, or expectations from them, to master you? to triumph in your mind over integrity, and truth, and worse—over the love and fear of the living God? But all this the real Christian needs not; not, at least, when in his right mind. It is enough for him to see before him his Master's footsteps. He has him to follow, and his prayer is that he may follow him with his whole heart and soul; it is his daily sorrow that he follows him at so great a distance. He hears him say, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself"—that keeps him from seeking to please his own bad heart; and when he tells him, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me"—that makes the man feel he must not seek to please an evil world.

Bring now these things together, and must we not each of us say, O let me strive to please God? Besides, there is the pleasure which flows into the soul from the consciousness of pleasing him. This is sweet indeed to the heart that loves him. It is worth all our self-denial, and all the worldly sacrifices we can make, to obtain it. To be able to look upwards and say, That great God who dwells so high, not only looks on me and loves me, but I, through the Son of his love, am pleasant in his sight; I, through his Spirit working in me, can give him pleasure; I, like my holy Master, am doing, though in much infirmity, those things that please him—this, brethren, is work

enough and almost joy enough for any mortal man on this side heaven. Is it your work and joy? Perhaps till this hour you have never thought about it. You have been trying to please yourselves and your fellow-creatures, but it has never once entered your thoughts to please God. And even now when reminded of it, it seems to you a strange thing, and you will go away and think no more of it. And others around you will do the same. You will seek to please them and they you, and God will be forgotten. But, brethren, dear and beloved, ought it to be thus? Will God allow it to be always thus? Yet a little while, and you that have so long sat and listened here to things like these, will sit here no more. Those seats will have other hearers in them, and this pulpit another preacher. You and I shall have been translated far away from any scene like this. We shall be in another world. Our neighbours die, our friends die, and you and I, though we think not of it, shall soon die. And what then is the testimony which is to follow us to the bar of God? "We pleased one another, Lord, but not thee. We valued the favour of our fellow-men, but not thine. We rejoiced in their love, but as for thy love, it was not the love we wanted; we let it go by." And will this do? Is this the testimony which you and I would desire to take with us into God's presence? Surely no. But what other have we to take? Alas! as far as regards some of us, I cannot tell, nor can you. O that even now you would send up a prayer to God, that it may not continue thus with you! O that he would dethrone and dethrone for ever self and the world within us, and enthrone himself in their stead! Better to have this testimony in a dying hour, that the Lord taketh pleasure in us, than to die with a whole load on us of the world's love and praise.

SERMON LVIII.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

A DISEASED WOMAN HEALED.

MARK V. 28.—“She said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.”

THE chief design of our Lord's miracles undoubtedly was to confirm his pretensions. They were so many powerful testimonies that he was indeed “the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” But they were more than this. Benevolent, for the greater part, in their character, they served to unfold the mercifulness of his nature. Had he been so pleased, he might have called the people around him, and, before their wondering eyes, have cast some huge mountain into the sea, or, like Joshua, have commanded the sun to stand still in the heavens, and thus have manifested his greatness; but his heart was full of love to the world he had entered, and it would not satisfy him to exercise his power without exercising his love with it. His mighty works therefore were works of mercy. The blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard; “he healed all manner of sickness among the people, and all manner of disease.”

And his miracles answer yet a further purpose. Many of them were so performed, as to shadow forth his mode of saving us, his frequent treatment of us while healing our spiritual maladies. And viewed in this light, there is a wonderful variety in them. Indeed had we to pourtray the diversified dealings of Christ with the soul in recovering the soul from its lost condition, these miracles of his would be nearly all we should want. We should only have to follow them one by one, and there would come out in the end something that would meet every recovered sinner's case; something that would cause every man

who is spiritually healed, to say, "Thus and thus did my blessed Saviour deal with me."

Some of us perhaps may find the miracle before us applicable in this way to ourselves.

I. We may notice *the sad condition of this woman* when she came to Christ for relief.

It was a state of disease, and of disease from which she had been suffering a long time—twelve years. Her malady too was an inveterate one. She had done all she could to be relieved from it, for she had applied to "many physicians," but all in vain; and worse than in vain, for in doing so, she had "suffered many things" from her physicians, and had "spent all that she had" on them, and "was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse."

Shall I say, brethren, here is a picture of us all? Here is certainly a picture of the diseased condition of us all. Whether we know it or not, we are all sick in our souls, and sick unto death. There is a disease in us, which has seized on the noblest part of us. It is weakening, and polluting, and destroying, our immortal spirits. In a few short years, if it is not cured, we shall sink beneath it. Thousands are sinking beneath it daily. It is filling not the earth only, but a dark hell with death and corruption.

And some of you know this to be true. When you say here sunday after sunday, "There is no health in us," you mean what you say; you feel the existence of this terrible disease within you, and are tormented by it, and disgusted with it, and would give all you possess in the world, to have it healed. Now you can look on this history and say, "Here is a complete picture of us. We too have been a long while diseased; we too have done all we can to obtain relief. O to how many physicians have we gone, and what remedies have we tried! ministers, and friends, and books, and sermons, and sacraments, and prayers, and resolutions, and duties! But no good have we got from any of them. We are nothing bettered. The burden of our guilt is as heavy on us as it was at first, and heavier; or if not so, the power of sin is as strong within us and as tormenting. We know not how to bear it, nor how to escape from it. Like this woman, we are growing worse. The Lord seems to say to us as he said to Israel of old, "Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous."

Now, brethren, it is for such as you that this miracle was performed, or, if not performed, recorded—such as have diseased souls and want them healed; such as are labouring under the burden of guilt, or suffering under the workings of inward corruption; such as want pardon or sanctification, and know not where to find either. Few as you may be in number, you are not passed over in this blessed book. In this history, the Lord speaks from heaven to you. O that you may listen to him, and that he may speak effectually to your hearts!

II. Mark next *the state of this woman's mind* in this sad condition.

Had it been in a despairing state, we could hardly have blamed her. It seemed reasonable for her to despair. What ground of hope had she? Every physician and every medicine she had tried, her disease had baffled. She had no money left wherewith to try more. But, observe, she did not despair. We find her, at the end of twelve years, still looking anxiously as ever for relief, and when she hears of Jesus, a new physician, determined to try him. And let me press on you, brethren, this part of her conduct.

One of the worst features in a penitent sinner's case, is frequently a tendency to despair. When we first feel slightly the weight of our guilt, we think nothing is more easy than to find relief from it; and when we begin to feel what the scripture calls "the plague of our own hearts," the power of sin within us, it is the same—we think that we shall soon overcome it. But when we seek pardon, and no pardon comes, or no sense of it; or when we have tried a long time to subdue our corruptions, and our corruptions grow stronger rather than weaker beneath our efforts, then springs up a new danger—we are tempted to despondency. We are ready to say, "There is no pardon for such guilt as ours; there is no victory over evil affections and tempers like ours." And then, if God does not stop us, it is easy to tell what will follow—we shall settle down in our guilt and sinfulness; we shall plunge lower in both from a despair of escape; we shall think no more of a physician or remedy, but try to forget our disease, or to blunt by hardness of heart its torment. This was exactly the state into which guilty Israel fell in the time of Jeremiah. "She said, There is no hope, no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go."

And again ; “ There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.” A fearful determination ! but it seemed to this sinful people the only one to which they could come. And despair does sometimes appear so reasonable to a stricken sinner, that, though he trembles at it, “ I must,” he says, “ sink into it.” But, brethren, of all evils, dread this the most. No sin so great as despair. No evil lust that you have in your hearts, nor all of them together, so bad as despair. It antedates the doom and wretchedness of hell. Your case may be sad, it may be sinful, and miserable, and, as far as you can see, hopeless ; but it is not hopeless, and would not be hopeless were it tenfold worse. There is a physician you have never yet tried, or have never tried aright ; and while you are within reach of him, while you are in a world where he comes and heals, the state of your minds should be, like that of this woman’s mind, a state of hope, and of hope like hers, active and strong, rising above every discouragement and impediment, and leading you to Christ.

III. Look now at *her application to him* ; “ When she had heard of Jesus, she came in the press behind and touched his garment ; for she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.”

There is *deep humility evident here, and great self-abasement.*

Other supplicants to Christ for relief had manifested feelings like these. One just before, Jairus, had fallen at his feet, and another, the Roman centurion, had sent messengers to him beseeching him, because he felt himself unworthy to come to him : but this woman does not fall at his feet ; she dares not send to him ; she is ashamed to look him in the face, or even to make her case known to him. “ I must get behind him,” she says, “ and, if I can, steal unperceived a cure.”

And herein, brethren, some of you have felt with her. Sin is a shameful thing. It is a loathsome thing. It is compared in scripture to things of the most offensive kind—to the plague and the leprosy, to “ wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.” It is called pollution, filthiness, abomination. And the contrite soul, in turning to Christ for relief, turns to him with feelings corresponding with these descriptions, with feelings of unutterable self-loathing and self-abhorrence. They go beyond

humility. The soul would hide itself, if it could, from every eye, and even from its own. It shrinks from itself as from a mass of disgusting pollution. Turn to the thirty-eighth psalm, and see what David's feelings were as he contemplated his own vileness. He not only talks of his sin as wounds, he speaks of it as corrupt and offensive wounds. He has not only a disease which leaves no soundness or health in him, but a loathsome disease which drives, he says, his lovers and friends to a distance from him, and makes even his kinsmen stand afar off. And think of Ezra. "O my God," he says as he thinks of his iniquities, "I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God."

O that you all understood this language, brethren! O that every one of you could enter into these feelings! This self-aborrence is no common thing in the world. The world, for the greater part, is too degraded to hate its degradation, or even to be conscious of it. But there are men in the world, who detest sin as they detest nothing else; and are ashamed of it, as they are ashamed of nothing else: and if you are of their number, you have reason to rejoice; you either are or soon will be in the number of the children of God.

Great faith too is manifested in this woman's application to our Lord.

She expected from him a perfect cure. "I shall be whole," she said; not relieved, but cured. And she expected it from means which seemed altogether inadequate; from a touch, a mere touch, and that, not of his person, but of his garment—St. Matthew says, the hem or fringe of his garment. And this touch too was to be a stolen one. She had heard probably of the multitudes who had already touched him, and been thereby made whole, and this might have encouraged her; but they had touched him with his own knowledge, and perhaps by his own command. She however waited for no command. "His mere garment," she said, "can heal me even without his interposition. If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole."

What exalted views must she have had of the Lord Jesus! And none ever go to him for spiritual healing without exalted views of him. No common Saviour, they feel, can meet their case. He must be a great Saviour, a mighty Saviour, an omnipotent Saviour, to be a real Saviour to them. The sense they

have of their own miserable condition has taught them this; and find them when you will at the feet of Christ, in whatever else they are wanting, they are never wanting in this—a high estimation of Christ and lofty thoughts of him. Is there a man here with low thoughts of him? any one who doubts his divine greatness, or still wants proofs and arguments to convince him of it? There is a man who most certainly knows nothing of the condition to which sin has reduced him; who has never taken a diseased soul to Christ for a cure, and in his present mind never will.

But the faith of this woman was not perfect. It settled only on one part of our Lord's character. While she believed his power, she distrusted his goodness. The very same act that manifested her confidence in the one, betrayed her suspicions of the other. "A touch of him," she said, "will heal me, but I must touch him secretly. If I ask him for his help or he sees me approach to touch him, he will spurn me away."

And this mixture of faith and unbelief is very common. We find it in almost every newly converted soul. Sometimes the power of Christ is distrusted; more frequently, as here, his mercy. "Lord, if thou wilt," says one, "thou canst make me clean." "If thou canst do any thing," says another, "have compassion and help me." One, like Jairus in this chapter, limits Christ to a certain mode of proceeding; "Come and lay thy hands on my daughter, that she may be healed." Another thinks that he must be applied to with certain recommendations or in a certain way. But it matters not—apply to him as we will, he will help us. If there is found in us any real faith in him, it attains its object. The infirmity of it is overlooked. To this fearful woman our Lord said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole;" and, in another place, he speaks of the feeblest exercise of this precious grace as almost omnipotent. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed," he says to his disciples, "ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

IV. Let us pass on now to a fourth point in the history—the *cure this sufferer received*.

Two circumstances are remarkable in this.

It was, first, *an immediate cure*. "Straightway," we read,

“the fountain of her blood was dried up.” St. Luke says it was dried up “immediately.”

And this is always our Lord's mode of acting with one class of persons who come to him—those who come to him for the pardon of their sins through his blood. The man who applies to him for this blessing, receives it the instant he applies for it. There is no delay in his case, no process to be gone through. The moment which finds him a believing sinner at his Redeemer's feet, leaves him a pardoned sinner there. With this woman it was a touch, and instantaneously a perfect cure. It may be the same, brethren, with you. There may be a look, a prayer, a turning of a wretched soul to Christ for pardon, that can find pardon no where else, and then a perfect, a free and full and everlasting forgiveness. “They that believe,” says the scripture, “are justified from all things.” “There is now,” even now, “no condemnation for them.”

Not so however with persons of another class—those who come to Christ to have the power of sin subdued in them. They are often kept waiting long for the mercy they desire; and not only so, the evil they want removed, seems frequently to grow worse while they are praying for deliverance from it. Look to this chapter. This case also is met in it. Jairus is described in it as falling down at the feet of Jesus, beseeching him to come and heal his child that is at the point of death. Our Lord sets out; but instead of hurrying thither as Jairus doubtless urged him to do, he stops by the way to heal this woman and afterwards to converse with her. And what must have been the feelings of that poor father while this was going on? And what must have been his anguish the next moment, when a messenger comes to him from his house and tells him that his child is dead—dead while he is seeking health and life for her of this mighty Jesus? The disease grows worse, observe, while he is seeking a remedy for it; the evil is aggravated while he is applying for relief, and aggravated in appearance beyond all remedy. But you know the result—that man's child lived again, the help he sought he at last found. So will it be with you. The sins which rage the more, the more you struggle with them, shall eventually wither and die. The deliverance you are seeking of Christ from them, shall eventually come, and come perhaps when you least expect it, and when you have begun to despair of it. The language of your Lord to you is the same as

his language to this trembling father, "Be not afraid, only believe."

But again—the cure of this woman was one *of which she and our Lord were both conscious.*

Our Lord was conscious of it. He knew "immediately in himself that virtue had gone out of him."

The woman had not expected this; she did not think of it. Her idea was, that she should get a cure from him without his being aware of it, and go away unnoticed. How little did she understand of the knowledge and love which were in that Saviour's heart! He saw her in her first approach to him; he saw her, in his divine mind, as she struggled through the crowd to get near him; he felt her trembling hand as she stretched it forth to touch his garment; and his heart overflowed with pity, and delight, and love, as he responded to that touch, and healed her. And all these feelings discovered themselves when he at last commended her, called her "daughter," and bade her go in peace. You think perhaps, brethren, that it is a small thing with Christ whether you come to him or not; you conceive that he on his lofty throne has not a look or a thought for you; but if you are turning to him with a broken heart for salvation, there is not an object in the universe he thinks of more than you, there is not a moment in which his eye is off you. Great as is his joy now, it will be greater still when you touch him and are made whole. He will say to his angels, as he said to his disciples here, "Virtue is again gone out of me. There is another sinner healed."

And the woman too was aware of the cure which had been wrought in her; "She felt in her body that she was healed."

Her recovery however did not produce in her at first the joyous feelings we might have anticipated. There was a mixture of feeling in her. She feared and trembled after she was healed, as many a pardoned sinner trembles when he has reason to rejoice; but healed she was, and she knew it. If for a moment, startled at her own boldness, she feared a new infliction of her complaint as our Lord turned round and looked at her, the next moment her fear was gone. She heard him ratify her cure. "Be whole," he said, "of thy plague."

And it is not easy to conceive how any one can be cured of the dreadful disease of sin, and yet remain long ignorant or doubtful about his cure. Were pardon all that Christ gives us,

it might be so. We cannot see his hand as it passes over the book of God, and blots out the dark record of our crimes which is written there, but pardon is not all. Sin is more than a crime against God which needs to be forgiven, it is a disease within a man's heart to be subdued and healed. And if we go on always doubting whether this disease within us is in a way of being healed, the probability is that our souls are sick as ever. It is not easy when a man is ill and recovering, to tell the exact moment in which his disease gives way and his recovery begins; but it is soon seen by those around him that his recovery is begun, and it is soon felt by himself. Just so with the salvation of the soul. A man may doubt for a time at his first return to God, and these doubts may recur again and again at intervals in his future years; nay, they will assuredly recur whenever he allows himself to wander from his God; but the habitual frame of the established Christian's mind is not one of doubt and uncertainty. Christ has not done so little for him, that he cannot see it. The Holy Spirit has not touched his heart so slightly, that he never feels his hand. The gospel is not so poor a medicine, that he is always doubting whether it has done him any good. The light, "the marvellous light of the Lord," is not so like darkness, that he can never distinguish the one from the other. The kingdom of God's dear Son is not so much like the kingdom of darkness, that he is never able to tell in which he is standing. He feels, and blesses God as he feels it, that a great change has passed on him. He feels that the plague within him has lost its power to destroy; that its rage is spent, and his soul is recovering. He cannot doubt, for he has a testimony in his altered affections, and altered dispositions, and altered life, that a mighty God has been at work within him. He cannot distrust, for he has experienced and is experiencing still the effects of his healing power. He knows what has been done in him. He feels in his soul that he is healed of his soul's plague.

Have you, brethren, felt this? Are you feeling it now? If so, heed not your remaining fears. Many of them are groundless, and had better be cast away. But tremble still if you will, so that you tremble at the feet of Christ. His language to you is, "Your faith hath made you whole. Go in peace." If it is not so with you, if you have never felt Christ's healing power, let me ask you, would you feel it? Do you desire to feel it? Then this history tells you, that feel it you may. It says that

one at least has been healed, who was as unlikely to be healed as you; and it reminds you that this one is only one of many. It says to you, Come to this Saviour; force through every discouragement your way to him; and then, let your disease be what it may, however malignant, dangerous, and inveterate, touch but his garment, the hem of his garment; exercise what may seem to you the weakest faith in him, and you shall be whole. O what a glorious Saviour to have within him such a power to heal! And what a gracious Saviour to be willing to heal so freely, so easily and quickly!

SERMON LIX.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

CHRIST INVITING HIS SAINTS TO HIS KINGDOM.

ST. MATTHEW XXV. 34.—“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

OF all the words that have ever been spoken, none yet perhaps have been so joyful as these. Happy indeed will they be who hear them, and happier still he who will utter them. They contain the last invitation of the Lord Jesus to his beloved church. Many gracious invitations has he already given us, but this, the last of all, will be the best of all; we shall never wish for another.

I. We may notice *the time when this invitation will be given.*

If we look backward in the chapter, we see that it will be just *after our Lord has assembled round him the whole world.* With him will come from heaven “all the holy angels;” “before him shall be gathered all nations;” and “then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come.”

Here then is a fulfilment of the promise he has left us, that if we will only confess him before our fellow-men, he will one day openly confess us. This public invitation to us in the face of all earth and heaven, will be an acknowledgment of us as his own before earth and heaven. When he thus says to us, "Come," it is like saying to all others concerning us, "There at last I make manifest my chosen. All that great multitude is mine."

And look forward in the chapter—*he will give us this invitation before he condemns the ungodly.*

It is worthy of remark that whenever he describes the final judgment, our Lord almost invariably lays down this order of proceeding. Three times over he has done it in this chapter. The wise virgins go in with the bridegroom to the marriage, and then the foolish virgins are shut out. The good and faithful servants are rewarded, before the wicked and slothful one is driven away. And here Christ says not one word to the accursed, till he has said to the blessed, "Come."

We may discern here the mercifulness of his nature. Judgment he calls his "strange work." He passes it by therefore till he has finished his accustomed, his more congenial and pleasant work. It is natural to him to bless. When he sees his people gathered together before him, he blesses them at once. There is no delay. He says in all the eagerness of love and joy, "Come. I cannot look on others, till I have welcomed you. I know I must drive away into darkness that guilty throng; my justice must have to-day an awful triumph; but let my justice for a moment wait. Before I strike terror there, I must close your hearts for ever from every fear."

We are told also that "the saints shall judge the world." It seems as though after their own trial is over, they are to pass from Christ's bar to his throne, and to sit with him there in judgment on the unrighteous. The sentence he is about to pronounce on them is a fearful one, and he will have it approved and accredited by their fellow-men, and the kindest and best of their fellow-men, when he pronounces it. Therefore he first calls the righteous to him. He will have his enemies go to their doom with the condemnation of their own brethren on them, as well as his.

II. Observe now *the character in which Christ will give this invitation*; "Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come."

Beautiful indeed is the introduction of this word in this place. At first we are ready to think our Lord has almost forgotten himself. When he begins this lofty description, he calls himself "the Son of Man." It is evidently his intention to represent himself as the Son of Man throughout it. But when he looks on his redeemed and thinks of the glorious kingdom into which he is about to lead them, his mind seems to fly to that kingdom, and he speaks as though he were already there with them. He is a King there; he dwells among his people seated on a throne there; and here he anticipates for a moment his heavenly royalty. As the great King of heaven, he says to them, "Come."

But there is a more evident and a weightier reason for the use of this term. In almost every country, sentences of a capital nature are passed in the king's name. Judgment is supposed to be the king's. And so here. Christ is now on a judgment-seat. He is passing sentences of life and death on unnumbered millions. He is exercising a royal act, and to let us see that he has authority to do so, he manifests for a moment a royal dignity. He calls himself a king—"the King," the only King men and angels are now to know.

And observe—there is the magnificence of a king all around him. "Hosanna," cried the people of Jerusalem when he came and revealed in lowly majesty a ray or two of his greatness there; "Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord;" but what were their hosannas when compared with the shout he comes with now? There is "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God" to proclaim his advent. As he rends the clouds, he appears before us as the Son of Man, and such, we may say, he really is; but he is a Man whom glittering angels follow to his seat, as they never followed any other; and before whom they bow down, as they never bowed down to any but the living God. And the seat prepared for him is a throne. He himself calls it a throne of glory. And if it is glorious in his sight, in the sight of him who comes from so high a world and measures things by so high a standard, what must it be in ours, and what the majesty of him who sits on it?

III. Notice *the persons to whom this invitation will be given*. The text does not indeed describe them; all it says of them is, that they are those on the King's right hand; but we

may discover in the text and the verses which follow it, three marks of these persons.

First—they are *those who have abounded in good works*, kind and charitable works.

And observe the tenderness of our Lord in pointing them out to us by such a mark as this. He distinguishes them, not by what he has done for them, but by what they have done; and not what they have done for him, though he speaks of it as such, but what they have done one for another. He says not, “I have chosen you, and justified and purified you. You shall be known by the white robes I have put on you—robes which my blood has cleansed.” “You shall be recognised here,” he says, “by the deeds of charity you have performed for my name’s sake in that passed away earth. I said your works should follow you, and now I explain my promise and fulfil it. I will proclaim your works. I will own them as I own you before these assembled worlds. Yes, I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”

And here perhaps comes some cold-hearted professor of the gospel, and cavils at this: he wants it explained away. Brethren, I dare not explain away one word of this sacred book. I would not willingly misinterpret one word in it, to meet the notions of all the professors of the gospel on the earth. Why should I? A man of real Christian feeling is no more staggered or puzzled by such a scripture as this, than you are by any other. He sees in it not human merit, but divine condescension; not the justification of his guilty soul by any petty acts of earthly kindness that he can perform, but the amazing grace of his exalted Saviour in taking notice of those acts of kindness. It is wonderful to him that he will think of him on his throne, but more wonderful that he will think and speak on that throne of any thing he has done. You could no more make such a man believe that his charities will open heaven to him, than you could make him believe his hand could move the world.

“But self-righteous men,” you may say, “will look at this scripture and draw from it food for their self-righteousness.” And so they would, put what interpretation or misinterpretation on it you please; or blot it out altogether from God’s word, they will find food for their miserable pride elsewhere. They would

extract the poison they want from the very flowers of heaven. Yes, place them in heaven, among prostrate angels they would soon find some reason why they should stand up; they would soon mingle with their Redeemer's praise some low, jarring praise of their own worthiness. It is not altering a text or altering a sermon, that will meet their case; it is an altering, and a thorough altering by the power of God, of their hearts.

But the people addressed in the text, bear another mark on them—they *think nothing of their good works*. The surprise they express when they hear of them, proves this. "Lord," they say, "when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick or in prison, and came unto thee?" Here indeed is humility, brethren, and self-renunciation! This is more than a casting away of our own righteousness; it is feeling that we have no righteousness of our own to cast away. If you want to shew self-righteous men their mistake, bring them here. Here are men commended by Christ himself for their good deeds, and yet can think of no deeds of theirs, that are worthy of commendation. The very sound of praise astonishes them. They know not what Christ means. They suspect a mistake. We see at once that in the world they have left, they could never have been indulging themselves in self-complacency; they could never have thought highly of their own righteousness, much less have expected heaven on the ground of it. We see that they are men who must have been making God's free mercy their hope, and are ready now to make that mercy their song. They will go from that judgment-seat to a world of glory, not elated with the scene through which they have passed, not speaking one to another of their own excellencies, but wondering at the grace which has been shewn them, and breaking forth into fervent and adoring thanksgivings to him who has shewn it them. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," will be no strange song in their lips. They will say in heaven like men long accustomed to say it, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

And thus does our Lord address at the same time in this scripture two very different classes of men. "You that talk of my love," he says, "and yet never feel any love yourselves; you that hope in my mercy or pretend to hope in it, and yet never

shew any mercy to your fellow-men; you that are cold-hearted, selfish professors of my gospel—I can never take you to heaven. It is a world of love; you would not be happy in it. And you that are proud and self-righteous—I cannot take you there. It is a lowly world. Self-exaltation has no place in it. God is every thing in it, and man nothing at all. You could not bear to be in it.”

And there is yet another peculiarity in these men—*they are those whom the Father has blessed.*

We have just been admiring the love Christ bears his people; we have seen how he appears to delight in keeping his own doings out of sight in order to bring forward theirs. See now how he honours his Father. Again he puts himself aside. He traces all the happiness of his people to his Father’s goodness. He says not, “Come, my redeemed. Come, ye whom I have so much loved and so dearly purchased; ye whom I have so gloriously saved.” No. “Come ye,” he says, “whom my Father has loved, whom my Father has saved, to whom it is my Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom. Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom.”

There was once, brethren, a curse on these men and a heavy one. It involved in it a sentence of everlasting banishment from God’s presence, the same fearful sentence that is pronounced by Christ in this chapter on the men at his left hand. There was no admission for them into heaven. It would have been useless to say to them, “Come.” But Christ takes on him their nature; bears in that nature the punishment of their sin; redeems them from the curse that rested on them, by making himself a curse for them; and now, their sentence being cancelled, heaven lies open to them; now he can say to them, “Come;” and now they are blessed, for he has purchased blessings innumerable for them, and he has blessed them. But all this, observe, he here buries in silence. Others may speak of it, but he will not. It was God the Father, who sent him down to be their Saviour; it was God the Father, who made him a propitiation for their sins; he was only doing his Father’s work, when he gave himself for them. It was the Father’s grace that chose them, and the Father’s mercy that pardoned them, and the Father’s power that kept them, and the Father’s love and pity that from beginning to end redeemed them. Passing over therefore all his own sufferings and doings in their behalf, he

says, "Come, ye blessed of my Father." Losing sight of the channels through which their blessings have come, he sees only the fountain and spring of them. O wonderful self-annihilation! Thus does he verify his own declaration to the Jews, "I do honour my Father." Thus does he prostrate his human nature before his divine. In the day of his triumph, on the throne of his glory, this Son of Man declares his manhood to be of small account; God must be all in all. And the lofty-minded Paul could enter into this feeling. He expresses it. "Ye blessed of my Father," says Christ. "Blessed," says Paul, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us—blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

IV. We may look now at *the kingdom to which Christ calls his redeemed.*

Observe, it is really *a kingdom*. This word means something. It is often used to describe heaven, so often that it must describe it with peculiar force. We get from it an idea of order and rule in heaven. It is a world that is governed. There is a King in it, and there are laws in it, and subordination in it. No anarchy, no struggling—we shall be all "willing and obedient" there.

And it forms one empire only. Countless millions are the inhabitants of it, but they are all linked together in one society; the same King rules over all. "One Lord, one faith," on earth; one Head, one kingdom, in heaven.

And still more is contained in this word. The saints themselves are said to reign in heaven. Heaven seems to be called a kingdom principally with a reference to their glorious condition in it. It is a world of kings. They shall live there as kings, in magnificence, and liberty, and power. None shall rule over them but God, and he shall so reign over them, that their royal greatness never shall be infringed on, or their liberty curtailed, or their power fettered. His service there shall be indeed "perfect freedom." The very same chapter in the Revelation of St. John, that tells us "his servants shall serve him," tells us immediately afterwards that "they shall reign for ever and ever." They shall be as so many crowned kings in heaven. And their crowns shall sit easy on them; there shall be no thorns in them. All the splendour of royalty shall be theirs, without its cares or burdens.

And this kingdom is said to be *a prepared kingdom*—prepared for this happy people, and long ago prepared for them, even “from the foundation of the world.”

Observe here again the mercifulness of God’s nature. Hell was not prepared for man. Christ speaks here as though in building his universe, the Lord never contemplated man’s banishment from him. He builds no place to receive him when banished. And now he must be banished, he will build none. He sends him away to a world already in existence, “prepared for the devil and his angels.” When he has to punish, it seems as though any thing would do ; it is easy for him to satisfy his anger ; but what can satisfy his love ? No world in his creation is good enough. He founds a special kingdom for his redeemed. He creates for them a special residence, and adorns it with a special glory. Or rather he says of his own heavenly kingdom, “Henceforth it shall be called theirs. I will make it over to them ; I will accommodate it to their natures ; I will furnish it for their happiness ; I will order all things throughout it with a reference to their abode in it. When they come to it, they shall find it a world made ready for them. Here at last, they shall say, is our rest and home. We expected to find this world of glory, a world strange to us ; but no strangeness do we feel in it. We are rather like men who have been for years in a foreign country, and find themselves all at once breathing their native air in their own land.” Thus the scripture speaks elsewhere of the things we shall enjoy in heaven, as “things that God has prepared for us ;” of the city we shall walk in there, as a city that “God has prepared for us ;” of the place we shall occupy in it, as a place “given to those for whom the Father has prepared it.”

And all this work of preparation, the text says, was done long ago. Our thoughts, brethren, take a narrow range. Days and years, mere fragments of time, are their boundaries. We are evermore shewing our littleness by the prominence we are giving in our thoughts to present moments. Not so Christ. Eternity was the world he had lived in. When he came here, in eternity still his thoughts moved, and of eternity he still spake. As he invites his ransomed ones to the kingdom appointed them, the hour when he created that kingdom for them, is present to his mind ; he sees his design in creating it about to be accomplished, and he tells them of that design ; he tells them how long his love for them had been in existence and action. “I loved you,”

he says, "before the light beamed forth or the earth was. I have loved you with an everlasting love. Come, inherit the kingdom I prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And again—this kingdom *is one which we are to inherit*; that is, we are to enter on and enjoy it as the heirs of it.

And from our Lord's lips, how natural, we may say again, is this language! Heaven is his Father's kingdom. He is at this moment addressing his saints as his brethren; he doubtless feels himself their brother. Therefore he makes use of this word "inherit." Therefore he says to them, "Come, inherit the kingdom. The God who is the owner of it, is my Father and yours. You have this day been manifested to be his sons. He will now receive you to himself as he receives me, without asking you why you are come. He feels towards you as a father feels towards the children he loves. It is his pleasure, it gratifies him, to give you the kingdom."

Hence we see that our possession of heaven will be free. We have not earned or purchased it. It is ours simply because in receiving Christ, we have received "power to become the sons of God." God in his abounding, sovereign mercy, has given us in Christ "the adoption of sons," and all a son's privileges and claims.

And our possession of heaven will be full. Were we to be merely servants in it, happy we might be, but we might have but a low place in it, and a scanty measure of its happiness. Going there however as children and heirs, all that is in it is ours and ours for ever. We shall have a full and perpetual enjoyment of it.

And yet once again—we are to inherit this kingdom *with Christ our Lord*.

There is one word in this invitation, which gives new sweetness to all the rest. It is the word that begins it, "Come." Were our blessed Master when he calls us to heaven, about to take his own departure to some other world, who would not say, "O let me follow him! I will joyfully give up that splendid inheritance and all my brethren and companions there, so that I may go and be with him." Happy to some of us are the moments we spend now in his presence. The wondering Jacob could talk at Bethel of "the house of God and the gate of heaven," and cannot we do the same, brethren, wherever we are, when we feel that Christ is near us? If we really love him,

our heart's first desire is to see him and be with him. And this he knows. The first word we shall hear from him on his throne, will tell us that he knows it. He will say to us, "Come." And it will be from the fulness of his own heart, that he will say it. No one in that multitude will so long to draw near to Christ, as Christ will long to have him near. He will lead his redeemed to their glory with greater joy than they will follow him there. He go to one world and send them to another? No; he would mar his own happiness as well as theirs, if he did. He will go with them to the kingdom prepared for them, and there as he sits down on his throne, he will say, "I will never leave you again. I told you that I would come again and receive you unto myself; and now farewell for ever to all distance and separation between us. Where I am, there ye shall be also. We suffered together in that world which is perished; we will be glorified together in this. You know how that world treated me. I still bear in my body the marks of its treatment, and I rejoice to bear them, for they will serve to remind you for ever how I have loved you. And I know how it treated you. It was not worthy of you, but it cast you aside as the offscouring of all things. Here at last we are where we are known. Here we shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father. We will inherit together this splendid world."

And now, brethren, what shall I say to you at the end of this sermon? This one thing only I would say—let it stir you up to aim at a lively conviction of the real existence of heaven, and the certainty of a coming judgment. It is not easy to get this. We are creatures of present scenes and present moments. The distant and future have but little power over us, amazingly little when we recollect that we are to live in the future and go to the distant. Talk to us of the coming of Christ, and the rising of the dead, and the gathering together of the world, and the opening of hell and heaven—most of us must feel that these things seem to us as ideal and visionary; our minds do not grasp them. But these things are realities or soon will be such, and very solemn realities. Think for a little. The ocean on our earth is in existence, though you do not see it; it is beating now on many a shore, though you do not hear it. If you had never seen the ocean, you would find it difficult to form as you sit there any distinct notion of it. It is the same with eternal

and heavenly things. They also are in existence; they also are real, though they seem to you as unreal. You must not yield to this infirmity of your nature, or you will one day find out your error. You must not give yourselves up to present things, for you are soon going away from present things. What will you do when you wake up and find all gone but heaven and hell? A trifle may place you in this situation. In a day or an hour, you may be there. Blame not me then for so often trying to lead your thoughts forward. Rather blame yourselves that they do not of themselves go forward; rather pray that God the Holy Ghost may carry them forward. O that our minds could ever live in futurity! O that we could think as dying men ought to think of the world we shall soon be in! The distant, the unseen, the eternal—these really are the things which most concern us, brethren. Our home lies among them. We shall one day be as familiar with them as we are now with the scenes among which we are now moving. O let us try to regard ourselves as very near them. Let us try to live in the daily anticipation of them. Then are our minds in a right state, when we can say with St. Paul, "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

SERMONS, preached at the Celebration of the Lord's Supper.
Third Edition. Price 10s. 6d.

SERMONS, preached in the Parish Church of HIGH WYCOMBE,
Bucks. Eleventh Edition. Two Volumes. Price 21s.

SERMONS, preached in St. James's Chapel, CLAPHAM, Surrey.
Sixth Edition. Price 10s. 6d.

SERMONS, preached in the Parish Church of GLASBURY, Breck-
nockshire. Eighth Edition. Price 10s. 6d.

A SELECTION of PSALMS and HYMNS for Public Worship.
Sixth Edition. Price 2s., or, Smaller Edition, 1s. 6d.

Preparing for Publication,

A Volume of SERMONS on some of the Trials, Duties, and
Encouragements, of the Christian Life.

LONDON :
G. J. PALMER, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.



BX
5133
B68
P7
1852

Bradley, Charles, 1789-1871.
Practical sermons for every Sunday and principal
holy-day in the year. 4th ed. London, Hamil-
ton, Adams, 1852.
xv, 556p. 24cm.

59 sermons.

1. Church year sermons. 2. Church of England--
Sermons. I. Title.

CCSC/mmb

A25178

